Sulfur 2

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SULFUR, published tri-quarterly, is at Box 228-77, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125. The present issue is Volume I, #2. Subscriptions $12 a year (three issues) for individuals, $18 for institutions; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $15 a year. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency. Single copy $5.00. No manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Logo by F.X. Feeney

Distributed in the U.S.A. and overseas by *Spring Publications*, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2719 Routh Street, Dallas, TX 75201; *The New York State Small Press Association*, Box 1264, Radio City Station, NY NY 10019; and by *Book People*, 2940 7th Street, Berkeley, CA 94710.

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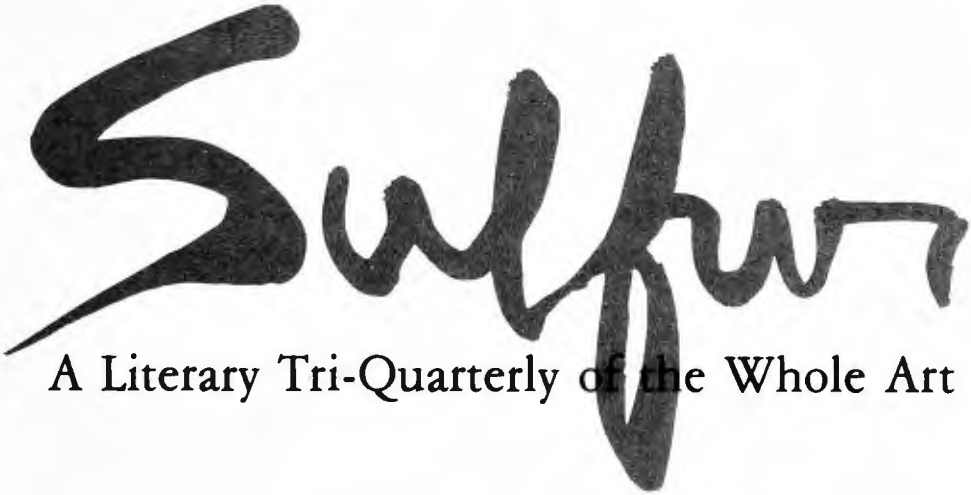

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Jerome Rothenberg

Harold Bloom: The Critic As Exterminating Angel

AMONG THE UGLIER IMAGES making up what will emerge as the myth of the 20th Century is that of Dr. Josef Mengele—exterminating angel of Auschwitz—who separated the victims bound directly for the gas chambers from those healthy enough to be spared for terminal labor assignments. His characteristic gesture, at least in my own vision of it, was a flick of either wrist & the laconic words, "You to the right" or "You to the left." One variant of the myth would have us believe further that Mengele, being a man of some "culture" or pretensions thereto, found the task sad but otherwise inevitable.

As goodness, we have been told *ad infinitum*, may sometimes spring from evil, I would have hoped that the image of Mengele's judgment (or its innumerable counterparts) might have helped us pull away from the model of man casting himself in the role of a judgmental god. At least I would have hoped so in the domain of art: an experimental ground in which such human possibilities can be played out as images. *"Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu"*—Artaud's great verbal act of exorcism—followed the savageries of

Auschwitz by a couple of years, & a characteristic if milder stance of some later avant-gardists aimed to create for art & poetry a function that allowed discovery while avoiding the pretense to judgment characteristic of most critical & literary traditions.

I'm reminded of all this in going over the critical writings of Harold Bloom—a task I set myself after reading a particularly indulgent piece of his exclusionary criticism that I'll discuss below. In Bloom, more blatantly than elsewhere, the idea of the critic as exterminating angel appears with characteristic regrets, etc., but in no uncertain terms. "However diffidently I give the answer," he writes in *Kabbalah & Criticism*, "I am engaged in canon-formation, in trying to help decide a question that is ultimately of a sad importance: 'Which poet shall live?' "

I'm aware of the hyperbole, even the absurdity involved in setting Bloom beside Mengele, but I can't help feeling that he himself must have had some such comparison in mind when presenting his work in those terms. The play of much of his criticism (& by far its most interesting aspect) involves his incorporation of Jewish mysticism & myth into a description of "post-Enlightenment poetry;" & this includes, beyond a reenforcement of Bloom's six rhetorical tropes or of his "revisionist" poetics in general, the use of such a solidly traditional figure as the *Malakh ha-Mavat* = Angel of Death = Satan = (by a common gnostic & Blakean inversion) god as Jehovah. His criticism seems obsessed as well with the killing-off of poets—largely of course with poets killing other poets, both forerunners & contemporaries, in a veritable battle-to-the-death. Given all that, it seems unlikely to me that as "Jewish" a critic as Bloom would not, in making his assertion of a "you live / you die" function for criticism, have been struck by the image of Mengele, in much the same way that as "Jewish" a poet as myself immediately felt its presence.

I will get back to the "Jewish question" shortly—as well as the not unrelated questions of poetic struggle & canon-formation. For the moment I would like to play with (& even "mis-read") some of the

key terms in Bloom's criticism, which together form a coherent if spiritually stingy view of reality & one that seems aimed (for whatever we might want to salvage from it) against much of what I take to be of most value in the poetry & art of this century.

2

Much of Bloom's energy as a critic has gone into the exposure of the blindness of poets about their origins in other poets—a blindness & an attempt at concealment that involves, most crucially, those poets whom Bloom professes most strongly to admire. This work of exposure is more than critic's busy-work, whether as simple source-study or as what Geoffrey Hartman calls, using some of Bloom's own terms, "a type of 'mis-reading' which helps poets to overcome the influence of previous poets"—or, as Bloom more accurately puts it, a "deadly encouragement that never ceases to remind them of how heavy their inheritance is." Bloom's involvement is intense, even personal, & what it finally reveals is his own blindness about the motives of his enterprise & its origins in what may be a deep struggle with, & antagonism towards, the very objects of his admiration. The work, in other words, is highly deceptive (to himself & others)—at least if one misses certain key confessions sprinkled through it, or if one is diverted by the radical nature of Bloom's great predecessor poets (Milton, Blake, Shelley, Emerson, Whitman, & so on) into thinking that Bloom is dealing in the present—as they in the past—with a true poetics of liberation. The approach-through-Bloom is in fact the reverse of any such position.

To begin with—& this shouldn't surprise anyone out there—Bloom's poetics, as he presents it, is militantly "literary." (This doesn't mean that it may not have other ends in view—political, social, etc.—but more of that later.) He is by self-proclamation an "academic critic," who presents the history of Western poetry as the work of a succession of academically based canon-makers, from the time when "Alexandria, which . . . founded our scholarship, per-

manently set the literary tradition of the school, and introduced the secularized notion of the canon"—a process which modernism (= "the Romantic psychology of belatedness") has challenged or confused but never, presumably, replaced. "Nothing in the literary world," writes Bloom in *A Map of Misreading*, "sounds quite so silly to me as the passionate declarations that poetry must be liberated from the academy, declarations that would be absurd at any time, but peculiarly so some twenty-five hundred years after Homer and the academy first became indistinguishable." (How the assembled ghosts of Blake, Shelley & Whitman would have handled that one, boggles the mind—though no doubt it provides Harold with a chuckle as well.)

What holds for the critic-as-academic-reader must also hold for the poets. That most poets who read are readers isn't the point at issue, nor that poets are "desperately obsessed with poetic origins"—& with other origins as well: personal, linguistic, cosmic, etc. For Bloom it must be tighter than that, & so he writes, in *Poetry & Repression*: "Even the strongest poet must take up his stance *within* literary language. If he stands *outside* it, he cannot begin to write poetry. For poetry lives always under the shadow of poetry." (Thus Bloom's favoring of rhetoric & so on over Wordsworth's "selection of the real language of men" or its more precise, therefore more threatening contemporary equivalents.) Or again, in *A Map of Misreading*: "Poems, I am saying, are neither about 'subjects' nor about 'themselves.' They are necessarily about *other poems*; a poem is a response to a poem, as a poet is a response to a poet, or a person to his parent." And the response, in Bloom's terms, is always a mis-reading, a mis-interpretation, the outgrowth of a struggle oedipally conceived: "To live, the poet must *misinterpret* the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the re-writing of the father." (Such misprision, in Bloom's account, may also involve the critic as reader, though the struggle there seems muted—not presented, for all of Bloom's exterminating passion, as a battle-to-the-death.)

In all of this, as I see it, the problem is not that Bloom takes a literary or textual approach but that he leaves us room for almost nothing else: an occasional nod towards the "reading" of nature or of experience, or a passing hint that precursors, even literary ones, may be other than poets or that the struggle may be with forces other than literary ones. Such one-sidedness is the price of obsession—his own, self-acknowledged, with the idea of influence & its attendant anxieties—& it leaves him often & inevitably at odds with his poets themselves, their poetics & self-interpretations, their views of their own & others' struggles where those contradict the needs of Bloom's particular "misprision." While Bloom is certainly aware of this, he "take(s) the resistance shown to the theory by many poets, in particular, to be likely evidence for its validity, for poets rightly idealize their activity; & all poets, weak and strong, agree in denying any share in the anxiety of influence."

The finesse of that last shot is absolutely breathtaking: an assertion of the critic's hegemony against all odds & certainly "all poets"—like Bloom's comment elsewhere that "the true poem is the critic's mind." It is as if Claude Lévi-Strauss had inadvertently confessed to Russell Means' worst suspicions about anthropologists; & seen in the larger frame of Bloom's intentions & assumptions, it drives home a separation between poet & (academic) critic, not as many of us have long felt it but towards ends that Bloom announces here & there with great forthrightness. So, he tells us in *A Map of Misreading*, "No strong poet can deign to be a good reader of his own works," nor should the critic speak for him exactly, because "this is not the critic's proper work, to take up the poet's stance." And having said that much, he goes on to question—from the critic's perspective—the term most central to the poetics of nearly all his targeted "strong poets" & to that Romantic tradition one might have thought he was defending:

> Perhaps there is a power or faculty of the Imagination, and cer-

> tainly all poets *must* go on believing in its existence, but a critic makes a better start by agreeing with Hobbes that imagination is "decaying sense" and that poetry is written by the same natural man or woman who suffers daily all the inescapable anxieties of competition.

The key word here—since Bloom has pulled us back into the "light of common day"—is "competition." Few poets would deny their identity as natural men or women (it is, if anything, part of the inheritance of the Romantic); but the discovery that competition—not imagination!—is the central definition of the natural & human (&, ultimately, the poetic) is a point that wouldn't escape the readers of *Commentary*, say, whatever effect, or non-effect, it may have on the readers of *Sulfur.*

We are approaching the crucial split between two human possibilities that marks Bloom's doleful "deconstruction," the moral choice behind his poet-critic cleavage, whose implications, since his position isn't timeless, become much clearer, more specific & more contemporary, elsewhere in his work. Thus, he writes in the introduction to *Figures of Capable Imagination* (1976):

> Poets lie, both to themselves and to everyone else, about their indebtedness to one another, and most critics and literary scholars tend to follow poets by hopelessly idealizing all inter-poetic relations. Now that the tides of aggressive ignorance, or the counter-culture, are ebbing, many of the absurd hopes that the young and their middle-aged followers placed in an apocalypse of society are coming to rest in the arts, particularly literature, in the belief that there at least the repressed can return, a belief much encouraged by such false prophets as Marcuse and Norman O. Brown.

If this isn't Bloom at his best—& it isn't—it's Bloom giving an unequivocal context for his present disturbance. The identity of the "false prophets" isn't worth an argument, though the question of the

other poet/prophets, who "lie . . . to themselves & to everyone else" (but from whom Bloom derives his livelihood), should at least give one pause—the relation of Blake, say, to "counter-culture" & "apocalypse" & "art" & the "return of the repressed." A notable "misreading," I'd have thought, to go from Blake's dream of liberation to this hostility towards those who would presume to carry it into the present. Knowingly or not (but no critic should "deign to be a good reader of his own works"), Bloom is here playing out the archetypal role of Blake's "Devourer": the antithesis of the "Prolific," who thinks he has the Prolific/the "producer" in his chains ("but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence & fancies that the whole"). In this, Blake writes as a (true? false?) prophet, pointing to the continuing existence of "these two classes of men . . . [who are &] should be enemies," for "whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence."

If Bloom is the Devourer—the diluter of energy, the reductive agent—"revisionism" is no longer the poet's (prolific) re-visioning but an attempt to turn the unqualified "freedom" of the Romantics & their successors into a qualified & "repressed freedom": itself a product of anxiety. The Devourer, then, swallows the Prolific's "excess of delights" but seems to choke on them; or, as Devourer-turned-teacher, he laments: "How is he [am I] to teach a tradition now grown so wealthy and so heavy that to accommodate it demands more strength than any single consciousness can provide?" Unlike the Prolific—the producer—who revels in his own & others' excesses, the teacher / Devourer/ critic is driven to despair & to canon-formation to relieve the stress.

As mere "academic criticism," the Bloom dilemma seems a little sad & silly. But it's never more than a short step from literature to those other areas where ideas like "freedom" & "repression" effect the actual ways we think & act as human beings. Given Bloom's own time frame & his sense already quoted of the counter-revolutionary nature of the middle 1970s & beyond, I will allow myself a political reading

of one of his statements *vis à vis* "strong" poets & "strong" poetry in *Poetry & Repression*, that "it is only by repressing creative 'freedom,' through the initial fixation of influence, that a person can be reborn as a poet." The terms are slippery & may at first be taken as purely self-repressive &/or psychological; but while Bloom relates his work to Freudian ideas of sublimation ("Geoffrey Hartman . . . calls the poetic will 'sublimated compulsion' . . . [while] I would call it 'repressed freedom' "), he himself tells us that his aim isn't "so to apply Freud (or even revise Freud) as to arrive at an Oedipal interpretation of poetic history." Nor is it simply a question of poetic restraints as a matter of technique or method. The issue for Bloom increasingly involves a response to a contemporary condition of yearning for which Bloom's own precursor poets had acted as prime movers. That response—at least the part of it that concerns me here—is threefold.

He is, to begin with, scornful of the ambitions of "post-Enlightment poets," although the scorn is sometimes hidden behind a mask of "melancholy." "Unfortunately," he tells us in *Kabbalah and Criticism*, "we have all of us arrived too late in the day to take on such a flamboyance" as that of Emerson & Whitman "chanting . . . that a large consciousness contradicts itself because it contains multitudes." But this late-in-the-day, therefore absurd flamboyance extends, we find out in *A Map of Misreading*, from "all of us" to all American poets whatsoever, "the most consciously belated in the history of Western poetry," who, "rather more than other Western poets, at least since the Enlightenment, are astonishing in their ambitions. Each wants to be the whole of which all other poets are only parts." Applied to Emerson & Whitman themselves (but also Dickinson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, & Melville), the Bloomian misreading moves from muted mockery to a diffident paternalism that only a true Devourer could master.

From such a defensive-aggressive posture, Bloom can put into question the stand of any of his great poet-precursors against repression itself. Such a strategy is at the heart of Bloom's mis-readings, in

line with which he proposes, in *Poetry & Repression*, to revise "all received readings, including my own," of such a poem as Blake's "London," since said readings "are wholly mistaken in seeing ['London'] primarily as a protest against repression, whether societal or individual." Here a cautious adverb ("primarily") keeps him from the arch-revisionist statement he seems really to be aiming at, but later he crosses the line & tells us that "Blake's poem is not a protest, not a prophetic outcry, not a vision of judgment. It is a revisionist's self-condemnation, a Jonah's outcry at knowing he is not an Ezekiel." All of which is a crazy "academic" view of a poet who shivers the boundaries of literature; who is Blake rather than Ezekiel (& no less important for that); & whose prophetic outcry co-exists with whatever "negative and self-destructive" elements Bloom may rightly or wrongly see in him.* We have here passed from mis-reading to deception: the attempt to reduce Blake's fine frenzy to that "failure of nerve" which, if I remember it correctly, underpinned the new conservatism of the critics of my childhood. (Bloom's teachers too—to whom he once again succumbs.) The process from here on in begins to read like critic's self-projection.

The third response I have in mind is something more than that, though clearly tied to Bloom's own situation. For what Bloom does at the extreme of his deconstruction is virtually to reject the idea of "freedom" in favor of that of "repression"—terms he has already revealed to have a "social" as well as "individual" dimension (i.e., not merely "literary"). Emblematically Bloom phrases this rejection as his turning from Milton's Satan (as interpreted by Blake): a poetic crea-

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* Before being misled by the contrast between Blake &, say, the Hebrew prophets, the reader can check out, e.g., the self-doubt of Ezekiel 20.49: "Ah Lord God, they are saying of me: Is he not a maker of allegories?" Or Jeremiah 20.9: "There is something in my heart like a burning fire / Shut up in my bones / & I am weary of holding it in / & I cannot." Or Abraham J. Heschel in *The Prophets*: "The prophet is human, yet he employs notes one octave too high for our ears. He experiences moments that defy our understanding. He is neither 'a singing saint' nor a 'moralizing poet,' but an assaulter of the mind." [All quoted by J.R. in *A Big Jewish Book.*]

tion whose influence had extended into the work of such American poetic "revisionists" as Ralph Waldo Emerson &, even, Emily Dickinson. In his characteristic manner he describes the turning not only as a matter of regret, but something deeper. "I am temperamentally a natural revisionist," he writes in *A Map of Misreading*, "and I respond to Satan's speeches more strongly than to any other poetry I know, so it causes some anguish in me to counsel that currently we need Milton's sense of tradition much more than Emerson's revisionary tradition. Indeed, the counsel of necessity must be taken further: most simply, we need Milton, and not the Romantic return of the repressed Milton but the Milton who made his great poem identical with the process of repression that is vital to literary tradition."

In the light of current New Conservative & Moral Majority maneuvers, the invocation of the language of repression & of Milton the Puritan (or a parody thereof) as counselor-on-tradition, cannot be confined to the world of literary studies. The "we" who need the Milton of Repression is ultimately a "we" that can't be narrowed down, Bloom tells us, by "sex, race, social class," etc. "If we are human," he writes, "then we depend upon a Scene of Instruction, which is necessarily also a scene of authority and of priority." And no matter how he tries to modify this into a middle-ground accommodation with the authoritative fathers, the stance remains contemporary with Bob Dylan's recent need "to serve somebody"—as Bloom's competition-as-creation might make a fit with the revivalist side of Milton (Friedman)'s economics.

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I'm not refuting Bloom here, so much as indicating his obvious & admitted deviations from the line of poets (the 19th Century ones at least) foregrounded in his work. The spirit of that work, it seems to me, isn't revisionist but, as he himself renames it, "antithetical": almost a full turn from the revisioning—the actual return to vision—that has marked our poetry from Blake until the present. I've

found Bloom useful in clarifying some of this, & I'm in sympathy with some larger part of what he attends to: Romanticism, kabbala, gnosticism, & so on. At the same time I'm distressed by the reductiveness of his work, by his unwillingness to revise or revision a narrowly conservative idea of tradition & "priority." There is, in other words, no questioning of "tradition" at its roots, but a reductive assertion "that everyone who now reads and writes in the West, of whatever racial background, sex or ideological camp, is still a son or daughter of Homer." No Coyotes or Taras appear in his mythologies, no Milarepas or Li Po's among his canonized poets. Kabbala & gnosticism gain entry as maps for criticism but otherwise his "canon" is still European & his specialization post-Enlightenment & English. So it remains only those poets devoted to the idea of the prolific, exuberant, & flamboyant who have made the move to let the greater world into our work.

Bloom's narrowness helps him turn any new or liberating sense of the past into a species of "belatedness," & it allows him to disregard the forwardness that has again & again defined an avant-garde over the last two centuries. It is against such forwardness in particular that his rage seems directed—& even more particularly against the forwardness that surrounds him here & now. The poets wandering past the Bloomian woods should at least be warned of this. "A map of misreading" may sound like a step towards the openings of indeterminacy or chance or towards a free experiment with word & thought, but it isn't. Similarly, his selection of John Ashbery (Bloom's one candidate for canonization among the old "New American poets" & the New York School) may feel like a leftward tilt but is, if anything, the scorning of poetic "movements" (the attempt to draw multiple voices into the work of *poesis*) in favor of the single poet winnowed from his peers.

While obscuring his own critical precursors in the anti-Blakean, anti-Miltonic New Critics, Bloom's aim—against the whole thrust of visionary & revolutionary poetics—has been to maintain the process

of canon-formation & the mastery of critic over poet, Devourer over Prolific, system-maker over "Inspired Man." To keep poetry within the domain of academic literature—to maintain, that is, the separation between art & life—he has devised a system that has both limited his own ability to read & to create, & has allowed him to be arbitrary in his selection of "strong" poets & "strong" poems. More than his method, it is his intention that seems so wrong & devious: a deliberate obfuscation that would reject (at least in his own time) the strong & bold in favor of those he sees, rightly or wrongly, as candidates for the purveyors of a "repressed freedom."

3

The arrogance of criticism prospers, even fattens, on the silence of the poets over whom it means to tyrannize. It is an illusory fatness, anyway, & there does come a time when some of us who make poetry are moved, for one reason or another, to break the silence & to respond in kind. For if critics are instructors, as in Bloom's view of it they are, so are poets; & it isn't always possible or useful to save ourselves the effort of that clash of instructions by surrendering the field.

What finally pushed me to a reading & a response to Bloom was his second attempt at dealing with, & dismissing, a generalized entity called "the American-Jewish poet." Since I'm a particularized version of that entity, I can be seen to have a personal stake in the matter. As a poet, of course, I'm supposed to thrive on personal stakes, while Bloom as a critic may be thought to have a need for more objective standards. But what's attractive to me in Bloom's work is that such "objectivity" is almost never there—& surely not when dealing with an entity so close to home as this one.

Bloom himself is a marvelous example of "belated" Jewish culture. It colors a large part of his criticism & it is, as I said earlier, its most interesting aspect (at least for me). This isn't a question of a down-home feeling shared by Jews, but that in dealing with certain

areas of Jewish tradition, Bloom allows himself access to the kind of uncanonized traditional material for which, by a curious display of willful ignorance, he seems otherwise to have so little use. The result, in a work like *Kabbalah and Criticism*, is sometimes very useful; & similar insights turn up in his other works & intersect with a referential network that touches as well on Jewish orthodoxy & gnostic heterodoxy—non-canonical also from a Western/Christian point of view. It's my feeling that if Bloom had allowed this network to expand, he could have made an extraordinary synthesizing contribution to our concepts of *poesis*. But he would also have been poaching incredibly on the poet's terrain, where "all ages are contemporaneous in the mind" & everything is possible.*

Bloom on the Jewish poets is something very different. The two pieces that raise that issue are "The Sorrows of American-Jewish Poetry," which appeared in *Commentary* about ten years ago & was reprinted in *Figures of Capable Imagination*, & "The Heavy Burden of the Past" from the January 4, 1981 issue of *The New York Times Book Review*. The first piece seems to have come out of nowhere—or out of nothing more than Bloom's suspicion of, discomfort with, or hostility to, the idea of (American) Jewish poets—while the second is

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* Bloom backs off from any such wide-spectrum synthesizing, which I assume is something he identifies, too exclusively, with the mythical "school of Pound." He is reticent as well about his relation to kabbalists & mystics, writing in *Kabbalah and Criticism*: "I myself am no kabbalist, and I hold no theosophical beliefs of any kind. I am merely a sceptic." While this is fair enough, his view of kabbala as "an interpretive and mythical tradition [rather] than a mystical one" also plays down its creative & performative side—in spite of his perception, e.g., "that the *Sefirot* are like poems in that they are names implying complex commentaries that make them into texts." Interestingly too his dismissal of himself as kabbalist is coupled with a repetition of his hostility to poets who make a conscious use of precursors: "Only weak poems, or the weaker elements in strong poems, immediately echo precursor poems, or directly allude to them." (I take this as one of the most symptomatic & debilitating attitudes in all of Bloom's writings—a damning result of his critic-poet cleavage & the surest guarantee that poets will be trapped in the past rather than free it up towards future uses.)

a review of a specific book, *Voices Within the Ark*, that presents 1200 pages, worldwide in scope, of what the editors, Anthony Rudolph & Howard Schwartz, call "The Modern Jewish Poets." The "simple" question, raised in the first essay but covering both, is "why isn't modern Jewish poetry better?" since, Bloom assures us, of the ninety American-Jewish poets in the Rudolph-Schwartz book, "only about a dozen have written authentic poems, true artifacts, and none of these alas has yet earned a place in the canon, though one or two yet may." And of those ninety American Jews (the Europeans end up only a little better at Bloom's hands, but it's clearly the Americans he's after), Bloom further assures us that "no single figure [is included] who so far matters urgently or overwhelmingly in the poetry of our country."*

Since this is Bloom writing, I take it, in the language of "natural man & woman"—or what we used to call "the man in the street" or "average N.Y. Times reader"—I assume we can go by the ordinary meanings of those sentences. Bloom in fact makes it a little difficult to test his proposition, since he names not one American-Jewish poet in the course of his review—unlike the earlier *Commentary* piece, where he may have exposed himself by doing precisely that. Still, a casual glance at the Rudolph-Schwartz book shows that among the ninety canonless Jews are Louis Zukofsky, Allen Ginsberg & George Oppen; among those missing, Gertrude Stein. Of these, Zukofsky & Oppen (along with Charles Reznikoff) had been dismissed ten years before by Bloom for ties to Pound & Williams; Ginsberg had been tagged "mock bardic" & had really blown it by being "beyond the

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* In the earlier piece he writes, under the categories of "melancholy phenomenon" & "sorrowful conclusion," that no "single American-Jewish poet of undoubted major status has established himself in a century now more than two-thirds gone." (Here, of course, his field isn't even restricted by the previous editors' choices.) The response—by a citation of poets—is obvious, though it would involve the literary equivalent of naming all-time "dream teams" without having first agreed on what game we're playing.

reach of criticism" (italics mine); & Stein, as always among "academic" critics & anthologizers, had again been left unmentioned. While I'm not one to get that easily into reputations & achievements, it seems inconceivable that in the ordinary sense in which a "figure . . . matters urgently or overwhelmingly in the poetry of our country," the aforementioned poets (or a dozen more if we really started naming names) could be said *not* to matter, or that some of those others Bloom does mention—Elizabeth Bishop or James Merrill or A.R. Ammons—could be said to matter *more.*

But we know already—don't we?—that Bloom is into something else: a devourer's need for reduction; a myth of poetry as a response to poetry & of person as a response to parent; & with that as the pre-set pattern, a decision by *fiat* as to who best fits it. So, the reduction & the claim for what matters proceed—here as elsewhere in Bloom—by a definition of "strong" poets as those who "tend to achieve an individualized voice by first all-but-merging with a precursor and then by pulling away from him, usually by way of a complex process of fault-finding and actual misinterpretation of the precursor." (This is the famous path-of-poetry-through-ignorance—as if to prove that Harold likes his poets blond & dumb.) And if we ask, before we swallow that, is that the mark of *every* "strong" poet, the answer from Bloom is every-strong-poet-since-the-Enlightenment. (He exempts Shakespeare & Co. as "antedeluvians" & can't conceive of primal sources like Homer & Bible as themselves "belated."*) It is Bloom's handle *par excellence*, & since it is, he wields it as he chooses—this one "strong" & that one "weak"—& if the parent-precursor gambit doesn't work (or if it works too well where he doesn't want it), he comes up with the "authentic poem" as the "true artifact." And so on.

As for the Jews, they fall, well, like Jews before the critic-

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* Consider the cover-up of Mesopotamian & Canaanite influence, etc. on the Bible—as part of the true enterprise of Western canon-making up to the present.

executioner, who informs us:

> All post-Enlightenment poetry in English tends to be a displaced Protestantism anyway, so that the faith in a Person easily enough is displaced into an initial devotion to the god-like precursor poet. This, to undertake it, is hardly a very Jewish process, and yet something like it seems necessary if poets are to continue to be incarnated. However far from Jewish tradition they may be, something recalcitrant in the spirit of young Jewish poets prevents them from so initially wholehearted a surrender to a Gentile precursor, and indeed makes them nervous about the process itself.

The statement looks so crazy as I read it over, that I wonder if Bloom isn't out to prove that critics are the real madmen in the critic-poet cleavage. All of it could, of course, be argued—from any number of directions—but to accept the premises to start with is, I fear, to walk into Bloom's language trap. Its mechanism is the standard double-bind: if Jews appear too Jewish they're in trouble, & if they don't appear so, they're in possibly worse trouble. "The dilemma," he writes, "seems to be either too much tradition or too little, and while such a dilemma typifies all 'modern' poetry, it assumes acute and crippling manifestations in most verse that intends somehow to be Jewish." Still, the Jews "work on under peculiarly internalized disadvantages"—a statement, in spite of its racist implications, never spelled out more clearly than what I've already quoted. But then, he tells us, "Jewish history [was] almost always catastrophic"—or, as they said, in my family & probably in his, "OY OY OY it's hard to be a Jew."

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I have been asked by friends—both Jew & Gentile—who have watched me tussling with the Bloomian angel, to conjecture on the root causes of his Jewish problem. Although speculation of that sort—dealing, as it would have to, with questions of literary &

psychological "priority"—would turn the tables on a critic devoted to a probing of such origins, it feels uncomfortably far from my previous poetics. I can, however, speculate on some of the reasons, explicit & implicit, that appear in his own writings, & can see where my comments on those will lead us.

In *Poetry & Repression*, for example, there's a discussion of Giambattista Vico's "*new* science," an 18th-century enterprise that involved a return to what Vico took as the *oldest* strata of human thought & language: a hieroglyphics of "mute signs and physical objects" followed by a figurative, "poetic" language or "poetic wisdom —much like that "science of the concrete" (C. Lévi-Strauss) later ascribed to "primitive" peoples by the strangers who came to study them.* The true poets for Vico were the first peoples (= "gentes" or "gentiles"), "who spoke in poetic characters" & whose language, theology & social institutions he contrasted not only with those of Jew & Christian (as Bloom presents it) but of all peoples (Chaldeans, Scythians, Egyptians, Germans, Greeks, & Latins) who had gone through a development from family or tribe (= *gens*) to a "civilization" that brings a separation from "poetic wisdom" & the creation of a "human language" of "common uses" that he identified with "prose."

Since the Jews had also undergone such changes, it is curious how often in Bloom's discussion the distinction becomes that of Jew & Gentile, with the Christian given entry as a kind of adjunct to the Jew. (That last point, however, I find truly ambiguous.) Thus he writes: "In Vico's absolute distinction between gentile and Jew, the gentile is linked both to poetry and history, through the revisionary medium of language, while the Jew (and subsequently the Christian)

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* "In devoting half his book to poetic wisdom, Vico exhibits scientific and religious wisdom seeking to know itself by recovering its own origins in vulgar or poetic or creative wisdom. In doing this, it becomes itself creative, or recreative . . . re-creates itself by re-creating the first science, that of augury or divination, out of which all the others grew." (Thomas Goddard Bergin & Max Harold Fisch, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*)

is linked to a sacred origin transcending language, and so has no relation to human history or to the arts." And again: "A strong poet, for Vico or for us, is precisely like a gentile nation; he must divine or invent himself, and so attempt the impossibility of *originating himself*. . . . Since poetry, unlike the Jewish religion, does not go back to a truly divine origin, poetry is always at work *imagining its own origin*, or telling a persuasive lie about itself, to itself."* It is as if Bloom had taken one of the terms in Vico's universalizing version of a primitive-civilized dichotomy—"with our civilized natures we cannot at all imagine and can understand only by great toil the poetic nature of these first men" [= gentiles]—& had fixated on the Jewish-Gentile distinction the term implies in common usage. By so doing he can advance the standard view of the Jews as a people set against divination & graven images, etc., & can contrast "the link between poetry and pagan theology" with the "[perpetual] war between poetry and Hebrew-Christian theology." In this the Christians are somehow let off the hook by Bloom; but the Jews, himself among them, are made to live forever beyond the pale of poetry.

I can only sense that Bloom, as Jew, feels himself cut off from poetry, and that he projects this deprivation onto other Jews. As if to explain & even justify this loss of poetry, he invokes the horrors of the Holocaust & the "burdens" of Jewish history:

> If one adds to the indescribable horrors of Jewish history the strength and power of Jewish religious traditions, from which

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* That poetry—"unlike the Jewish religion"—doesn't go back to a divine origin would seem to be Bloom's opinion or his mis-reading of Vico. In the New Science, in fact, Vico has it that the first language—hieroglyphic & poetic—was from an "age of the gods in which the gentiles believed they lived under divine government," etc. It was only the later ages, then, that brought a "human" view of poetry & language. Accordingly, the "gentile poets" must share with the "Jewish religion" a sense of divine origins—or, in my own terms, a sense of the "sacred" underlying all acts of *poesis*. Unless one argues that the Jewish revelation is "true" & all the others "false," as Bloom may in fact be doing, the Jewish-Gentile distinction is cancelled at this level.

> most contemporary Jews are now so largely estranged, then the force of the past becomes so great as to inhibit imaginative consciousness and to stifle inventiveness. Who could be adequate to thematic concerns so annihilating, to losses so painful, so fresh, and so irreparable? (*N.Y. Times Book Review*, January 4, 1981)

Bloom is here echoing Adorno's famous comment on the impossibility of writing poems after Auschwitz, pushing it further than Adorno, & placing the curse on those Jews—whether they write as Jews or not—who can imagine the possibility of a survival into the present. This self-projection—& I have no other way of describing it—is then translated into a "double belatedness" for modern Jewish poets, "coming after the virtues and sufferings of their ancestors, and also after the main sequence of Western poetry has worked itself through and perhaps out." It would thus seem that if American poets are "the most consciously belated in the history of Western poetry" & Jewish poets are "doubly belated," the combination of the two is absolutely "catastrophic."

• • • • •

"A strong poet," then, "originates himself"; & in this re-reading of old Whitman, the possibility of all our poetry opens itself again. Such self-origination ("soul-making" in Keats' phrase, world-making elsewhere) takes many forms—including a "collaging" from the (literary & non-literary) past & present. Its constructions of identity are individual or broadly human or set in the framework of a special culture or tradition. In the Jewish instance, it has involved the work of re-writing ourselves within a real but collapsed tradition of language-centeredness & resistance to oppression. As such the collapse is more an opportunity than a threat, which Bloom, had he survived the struggles with a crippling orthodoxy ("the hand of jealousy among the flaming hair"), should have been the first to see.

But this "Jewish instance" itself, for all its particularities, is part of a larger work of human striving. The Jews like others have a history

that moves from tribe to state & in that movement sets up a struggle between new vision & the literalisms of the canon-making mind. In *A Big Jewish Book* I had to make this clear, because the Jewish distinction was a trap that robbed us—even as Bloom would—of much of our power as poets.

If Jewish history is a "burden," so is all human history—I take it this is the final message of what Bloom calls his "Gospel of Gloom"—& *no* poet's voice should now be possible. But this is nonsense & a neurotic distortion of what the real work is all about. When Maria Tsvetayeva, herself not Jewish, tells us that "all poets are Jews," I would hope it's in this sense that she means it.

The manifestos have been writing themselves for eighty years, & Bloom has still not learned to read them.

4

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom conjures up the Covering Cherub, a figure from Jewish mythology incarnated anew through Blake's imagination. The Cherub—who in one tradition may be the Exterminating Angel himself, the *Malakh ha-Mavat*—guards the Tree of Life & blocks the return of fallen man to Paradise. The same figure appears in the Jerusalem temple, where the two carved cherubs over the ark (the Edenic cherub is also double) "cover" the mercy seat with their wings; & in Ezekiel the Covering Cherub represents the "Prince of Tyre," a type of the earthly city whom "I will destroy . . . from the midst of the stones of fire."

Like any genuinely multiphasic image, the Cherub's surface meanings continually shift, no less so in Blake than in his Biblical predecessors. (Singular meanings—or "allegoric delusions & woe"—would in fact be an aspect of the Covering Cherub's threats to the "Inspired Man.") With Bloom, working after Blake, we get a number of set & sometimes contradictory readings, & at least one major omission, of what seems, curiously, a most obvious use of the image in Blake. The occasion for Bloom is his attempt to drive home the "anx-

iety of influence" as the central fact of poetic composition—of which the "struggle" between Blake & Milton provides the clearest instance. And since Milton—or "Miltons *Shadow*," to be more precise about it than Bloom is—is at times identified, in Blake's *Milton & Jerusalem*, as the "Covering Cherub," it isn't surprising that Bloom calls up the identification & generalizes the process to poets after Blake:

> For Collins, for Cowper, for many a Bard of Sensibility, Milton was the Tyger, the Covering Cherub blocking a new voice from entering the Poet's Paradise. . . . In Blake he is fallen Tharmas, and the Spectre of Milton; in Yeats he is the Spectre of Blake.

But elsewhere in *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom tells us that "the Covering Cherub stands between the achieved Man who is at once Milton, Blake, and Los, and the emanation or beloved"—in which case the poets aren't pitted against each other, and the covering Cherub, who threatens Blake & Milton both, may in fact not be a poet.

There are a number of such non-poetic readings in Blake, & one of the ideologically crucial ones—as interpreted by S. Foster Damon in *A Blake Dictionary*, & here omitted by Bloom—is that "the Covering Cherub sums up the twenty-seven Christian heavens which shut out man from eternity" & by which "the truth becomes petrified into dogma and relegated to ritual":

> And these the names of the Twenty-seven Heavens & their Churches . . .
> All these are seen in Miltons Shadow who is the Covering Cherub . . .
> The Heavens are the Cherub, the Twelve Gods are Satan . . .
>
> (*Milton* 37: 35, 44, 60)

Here, of course, is the ideological kingpin of Blake's argument with Milton, the puritanical side of him (his "Shadow") that "wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God" & thereby "enterd into the Covering Cherub." But Bloom prefers his own psychological &

literary struggles to the struggles of his "post-Enlightenment" poets against repression, authority, & dogma—that is, against the total apparatus of canon-formation both as a religious & secular phenomenon.

In place of Blake's anti-Christian/anti-canonical view, Bloom chooses to put forward the idea of the Covering Cherub as a "demon of continuity"—the enemy therefore of that "discontinuity" from the past which was "freedom" for the Romantics. By doing so, he can present the Romantics & Moderns as narrowly future-directed & hostile to ideas of poetic lineage that would—at least in Bloom's terms—psychologically diminish them & threaten their survival after death. The concept he needs to pull this off is that of an established & unchanging past—just the kind of fixed tradition (= canon) challenged by those poets who have sought a true re-visioning of the larger human past & present. To mis-read in this way is to conceal the "strong" (experimental) poet's simultaneous regard for lineage & the "academic" critic's desire to obstruct it.

The Covering Cherub—to pull Bloom's reading further—not only keeps the poet from the paradise of poetry but from a natural relationship to all those poets who inhabit it. It's a pretty rotten business all around, & the Cherub in this sense begins to lose his resemblance to anything like a "strong" precursor poet—even for Bloom, who writes:

> In this discussion he is a poor demon of many names (as many names as there are strong poets) but I summon him first namelessly, as a final name is not yet devised by men for the anxiety that blocks their creativeness. He is that something that makes men victims and not poets, a demon of discursiveness and shady continuities, a pseudo-exegete who makes writings into Scriptures.

But the weariness & weakness of Bloom's "poor demon" is such that Blake's words from another occasion leap to mind: "Those who

restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling."

Who, then, is the Covering Cherub?

If we accept Bloom's version of him—& in fact we don't—are we to see him as Milton's specter or as Blake's, or as any poet's who still speaks to us from the past? How turn Shelley or Whitman into victimizers of future poets, except on the level of a trivial psychological competition? Is it a poet who tries to keep us from our poems, or someone else: "a demon of discursive and shady continuities, a pseudo-exegete who makes writings into Scripture"?

But we know, after all, who threatens us. We know who reminds us of how "heavy" our "inheritance" is; who tells us not to deign to be good readers of our own poems or to think that we can write at all "after the deluge"; who enters into Milton's Shadow—& "not the Romantic return of the repressed Milton" but the Puritan Milton of repression. And we know who proposes the discontinuities between poets & rejects those who might know their lineage too well. We know who thinks that he "can block a new voice from entering the Poet's Paradise" or who would presume "to help decide a question that is ultimately of a sad importance: 'Who shall live?' "

The game, in short, is up. The Cherub's wing droops & reveals a face a little rounder & a little softer than we might have thought: the melancholy sweet face of those "cherubs" of our childhood.

That much, it seems to me, is clear. And clear also is Bloom's summation, his confession of the Cherub's fate: "He cannot strangle the imagination, for nothing can do that, and he in any case is too weak to strangle anything."

10 August 1981

△

Ronald Johnson

Ark 35

Spire called Arm of The Moon

That, too.
Body english bowed back on itself
Wingèd
swallow-head
blown diaphanous as glass
cartwheel to and fro,

plenilunium
bellyd
"full of eyes round about"
at large in flesh.
Toes dug into the field of vision
(as shadow, the sun)

I sing
the one wherein
all colors of this whirling world begin
and end.
Notice our roof of bells,
caduceus stairs

which rise
(the exact opposite of alignment)
twin iris of ice

to the corner stars.
Between,
planes perpendicular to being.

Being, paramount.
Compare this ceiling of circulatory angels
thinner than a human hair
in context
say, meadowlark's nest.
Note there the ruff of the Green Lion.

Stiff as a geranium
he holds the blue-gold scroll of up above,
when all things
move.
This is the Tower of
Bearings:

twenty-two arches
per square inch
of trees-falling-through-forest 'all ears',
a smallish galaxy for alcove.
This plaque reads
O

Become Adam, become his sparks and limbs.
You will see it too.
Exact as Ezekiel
amidst the long way back
Aurora consurgens!
"that the inwardes of my head

be like the sun"

I build.
With this tool I made angels
appear to-become-a-pool
Pressed for breath
they run sidewise along rungs of tapering

spiracles,
sight end on end.
They have red wings as in the miracles.
That way, one of twelve
waterfalls
dividing fellow underworlds.

This, gold ball
(some numen common to all men)
windmill
implied by the huge motioned sky domed overhead
dancing all on a pin.
By hand, I said.
that too

△

Axes 26

We enter the world already around us.
If the weave continues, it
grows tighter — a noose —
heart and root of what was pure.
A misreading, perhaps, but one
that makes it — tight and tighter.
Whelm and overwhelm this world.
We see in darkness —
hear in void.
What we know, we do not master,
nor should it be the wish.
A few examples of us
are enough.
The rest become impertinence.
Not *what* we understand — but
how.
The same things echo many times.
Time slows, if the will is
slow enough.
Now take the portion
of that time, and open to it.
Not *what.*

The sun obscured, as if by clouds,
but no clouds —
thickening —

a density results. The shadows pale
as objects take their place—once more
the weave.
(Washed over—
A long time—not always
a long passage.
It is often the place where.
I have been there. I am, still.
As if all that had happened
counted for nothing—
no movement—if movement counts.
Then, looking at that line of trees
along the ridge,
I laugh,
and they must, too.
It all happens in the place
at hand——
transpires.
The edge of where we walk
leads into danger—
pits and quagmires.
Have a care for such a path,
that what you leave may not
set snare or deadfall
for the next to follow.
Heaves and draws—
that place among
all places
'lest thy foot'
or keeping of a brother
{hawk's wing
{daylight
all pure moonshine.

Ready as we are,
and steady as the weave.

Approximate song—
when I have feared
there would be none.
No more.
I should have waited.
It is easy to wait
only
when one hears
the songs which are about us—
always
about.
It is that tenuous world
we do not trust.
Float on filament—the web
it is thrown out first—
one thread
shimmering.
A part of a world—
a hold on it—
one thread and one thread—
the many from the little.
I came in here.
I am not leaving.
It was the slow weave
that made the surety.
Tendril sensing pole
before the pole was set.
The hard times *are* the best.
And we bespeak the meaning,
trying for another part

which has no part of us.
The forms of being
will not let it be.
I creep in shade to hide
from sun that gives me life.
There is no gratitude.
There should be none.
We worry at the values
and forget the objects—
valued by a scale
which does not stem from them.

Long is the weave—
—and wide.
Direct as that we live in it.
Caught in the web,
the bars of substance.
The time comes and goes,
a pace and pulse,
apace—
neglected sense of it.
The dull light absorbed.
Our heat precludes it.
Dense remark, it lasts
to clearing.
Bending, the pulse becomes
the pulse.
Throb touches.
expands the midnight—
bridges back.
Despair removes itself.
We have no lodging for it.

Nor did I know—
where did *that* come from?
What it implies—
a book
of ancestors—
the men I stem from
are the rocks and earth—
nor did I,
waking,
take the time to know them.
Now these letters.
Some I write,
and some
receive,
but news.
The news is hard to come by.
Only in the silence
is the voice—
the weave.
Whence? Whence?
Oh, let the words pour down,
as rain, and let them be
the passion of the doing.
Things becoming.
They are things, indeed—
fossils left upon the rocks.
The merds turned stone.
Nor did I know—.
I know in/deed.

And in that time,
I, not
thinking,

time enough
for a Haydn symphony.
The squash grows, visibly,
or a shadow
lengthening
from the ancestral past—
one from nothing
but a wind, contemporary
with this time—
my coeval.

It was the unfair asking—
all of it unfair.
Would we have it not?
No advantage to tip a balance?
These are the things
we think of,
and reverse.
My friend—my enemy.
You are the same,
and I am placed beneath you.
(Letter to the elders.
Set that down.)
(That double edge—
or trouble axe—
and if the wood allows,
it cuts—
the wood or word
enough is close enough
to take the portion out—
the fortune/potion—
how it comes as clean
or clear—the cut

replaced.
A xenolith—
trapped in a vein—
its current there.
The memories of hours
flow together.

LZ:80 Flowers

Better than ever
in the coming and going—
the riding by.
What we have made
to assuage what is left.
It is said
off the top
of my head.
It has reached
to the bottom—
slow move to the brightness.
It makes and it is,
and I am full circle—
allowing few points
to abet what is sensed,
and the end at the start,
though it flows
as the wind flows,
now and again and again—
now—now
there is echo—
short sounding
that which comes in,
again and again.

Well,

and now,
what does a man need?
What would he give to need
if the need were not
there?
No placing—
now and now—where—
who has lost
whatever it was he thought
he had?
and touch
another thing?
Was I that man?
so various? so,
not inevitable.
It is a little thing.
I was,
and am.
I go away
to come again.
These are the voices—
the imperatives.
Let them drop.

Yet the old dream on
within a shell.
Their rot and bile
take place of blood, and yet
a few fresh leaves
stand in the wind
as preferance
before the sun,
and sweat, pure drops of it,

Dahlberg

falls, showers
in the place they stand in—
 dying.
Raise no monument.
They go their ways,
and younger men pass by.
Yet passing, in its limit,
closes over us.
The road an old man takes
a young man follows,
swearing it is new.
The old man bitterly denies it.
Both are right—
and no man's sound
 is song for any other.

Temple—Milbridge, Maine *July 3,—September 24, 1979*

△

Clayton Eshleman

Seeds of Narrative in Paleolithic Art

> *"that uterine decantation from soul to soul which, body after body and driven by hunger for love, liberates a buried sexual energy . . .*
>
> *a well in which the uterine hunger of the soul mourns a love that has not been born, in which the fecality of the supernatural body of the soul writhes to death because it has not been born. This century no longer understands fecal poetry, the intestine malady of herself, Madam Death, who since the age of ages has been sounding her dead woman's column, her dead woman's anal column; in the excrement of an abolished survival, the corpse too of her abolished selves, and who for the crime of not having been able to exist, for never having been able to be a creature, had to fall, the better to sound the depths of her own being, into this abyss of foul matter and indeed so pleasantly foul in which the corpse of Madam Death, Madam Fecal Uterine, Madam Anus, hell upon hell of excrement, in the opium of her excrement, foments hunger, the fecal destiny of her soul, in the uterus of her own center. The soul, says the buried body of being, is that focal point of the survival of life which falls, fecal as excrement, and is piled up in its excrement."*[1]
>
> — ANTONIN ARTAUD

NARRATION IS CERTAINLY STORY, the recital of an event, and, since the word is based on *gnarare*, from *gnarus*, meaning "knowing," some sort of assimilation is implied. In some way, the significance of what happened is to be shown, either in the course or, as a consequence of, the story.

It is impossible to know when something that we today would recognize as narrative began to occur in human life. My hunch would be that it came about as a result of the invention of night life (meaning social life at night as well as that archetypal place that corresponds with a distinct mythic geography we call the underworld), made possible by the institution of fire. According to Louis Leakey, "before that, like birds or baboons, with the fall of darkness we sought our perch. Our daytime lives were pragmatic, absorbed with the chores of survival. The leisure of the evening was for the human being like a new ecological niche. There was the security of the shelter or cave, and the social focus of the fire that fascinates us yet today. Here talk became a pleasure, not a necessity. The day's adventure of the hunt could be told and retold, while children listened and learned. Memories were enhanced, myths began to take form."[2]

There is, of course, no record of this talk. When we look for evidence of the first seeds of narrative, we come upon Neanderthal burying his dead in red ochre-lined pits, on pine-boughs and covered with wild-flowers, at 75,000 BC. By tying the corpse up so that it looks as if it is being buried in a foetal position, Neanderthal may have been sensing the earth as both womb and tomb. He also may have been trying to prevent the formation of a ghost, for the tied-up corpses were often covered with a heavy rock slab. This event could be the earliest narrative seed, yet the only marks Neanderthal made were cup-shaped gouges on the undersides of these burial slabs. While such gougings are evocative of concave female space, they may be no more "narrative" than a two-year-old child chipping at the wall with a pencil, simply to act on matter, to affect the outside.

It is not until around 30,000 BC that we find evidence for the beginning of the liberation of the autonomous imagination. Much of this evidence comes from south-central France and northern Spain, and was done by people (whose brains were slightly larger than ours) called Cro-Magnon, and consists of finger-doodlings in soft clay, sculpture, engravings, and paintings in caves as well as incised weapons and tools.

I feel that what we call image making and, consequently, art, was the result of the crisis of the separation of the hominid from the

animal into the distinct though related classes of the human and the animal. Why it resulted in image making when and where it did probably has much to do with ice age conditions—an almost total dependence on animals for survival (though Cro-Magnon seldom depicted red deer, his main food source) as well as the effect of severe and prolonged cold on a body that originally evolved under temperate and even tropical conditions. Seemingly suddenly, at around 30,000 BC, these people began to put the animalness that they were losing (or really, had lost) yet were utterly dependent upon, onto cave walls—often in the depths of caves, in nearly unreachable places. Consciousness, as I am thinking about it, seems to be the upswing of a "fall" from the seamless animal web, in which a certain amount of sexual energy was transformed into fantasy energy, and the loss was partially and hauntingly compensated for by dreaming and imagining as processes not directly related to survival.

Cro-Magnon's main cave wall obsession was with big herbivores, such as bison, horses, mammoths, and deer. These animals are often painted as if they have been hung on the cave wall, separately, with no relationship to each other—at least in what we would call a narrative sense. Only occasionally do the painted animals seem to interact, e.g., one sniffing another's sex or two animals copulating. There is one considerable exception to what I say here, in the "well" at Lascaux, and I will come back to it later.

The first images of which we have record appear to be crudely

Figure 1

Figure 2

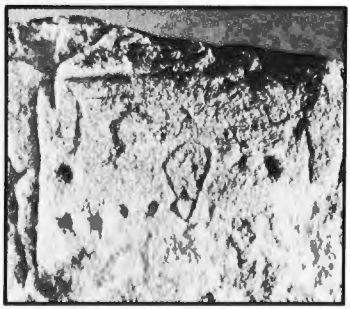

Figure 3

gouged vulvas and possibly phalluses mixed up with animal indications, as well as thousands of seemingly abstract meandering lines and

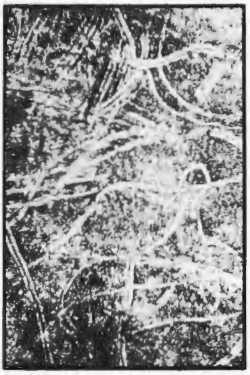

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

dots—either separate dots, or dots in various formations. As we come forward in time, say up to around 16,000 BC, the human image begins to emerge, often in one of three image situations:

1) Person appears to be a satirized, bestialized, distorted phantom. Such terms, for me, translate back to the fact that it did not at this time recognize itself as human in any finished, completed (or

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

even vertical) sense. Person was a kind of grotesque merger, anticipating Roman *grotesca* and Mochican ceramics (in which human beings are depicted copulating with a vast variety of animals, birds and insects), of abstract signs and realistically depicted animals.

2) Woman, less often engraved on cave walls than man (and when presented either engraved in profile with greatly exaggerated buttocks or sculpted in frontal view, as the figure from Laussel holding up a horn) *is* free-standing sculpture, the so-called "Venuses," small

enough to fit in the hand, whose legs and necks taper (or bulge) into anonymity and whose image force is in obesity, a thick mid-lower body girdle of sex, buttocks, stomach and breasts.

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

3) Man begins to appear as a dancing elfin fleck in engraved friezes of wandering lines and animals, and while the shape indicates human being, he is either part animal or garbed in animal, a camouflaged piece of the shattered hominid/animal mosaic.

In almost every case the figure of the human is masked, and often appears to be moving—or, as in the case of the female Venus statuettes, appears to have been tapered to a point so as to be fixable in the ground (several were discovered in such a position). Two narrative seeds can be gleaned here: the masked, dancing shaman as Coyote or Shiva, the trickster hero of myths all over the world, constantly in transformational motion—in contrast to the fixed, matriarchal figure of "The Great Goddess" who will become the central figure of Mesolithic and Neolithic visions of the womb that is the tomb that is the contrapuntal rhythm of spring and autumn, where the natural and the human are as strands of one cycle twisted upon itself.

Paleolithic space appears to be multidirectional, not only a world

of broken inter-relation where everything is in association, but also a world that is not partitioned from its material by a frame or some other boundary device. Since there seems to be no evidence for distinguishing sacred space from secular space in paleolithic imagination, it makes sense to me that paintings were retraced, i.e., participated in again and again by people who were probably in no way related to the original painter.

One could almost say that there is no evidence in paleolithic art space of the distinctions we make between an exterior and an interior. It seems to be neither inside anything nor outside anything. On the other hand, a sense of boundary appears to be emerging *within*

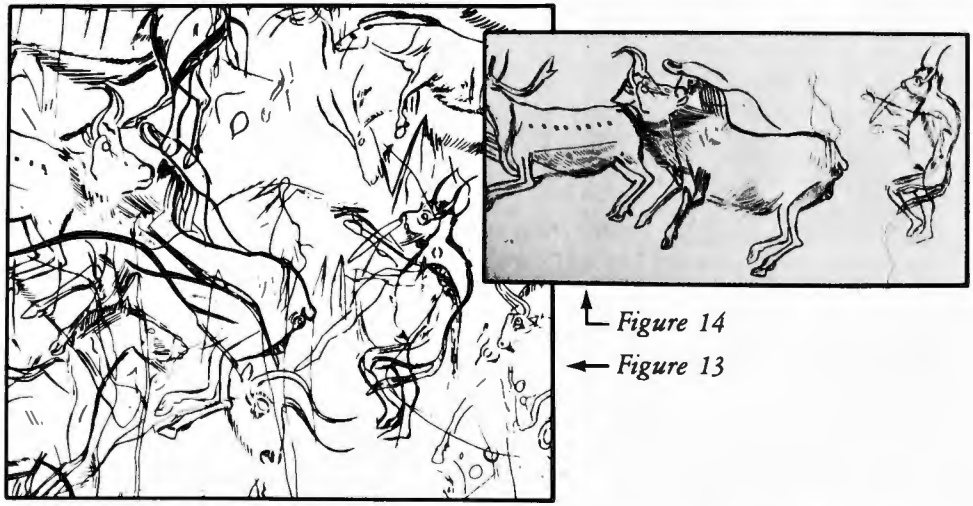

Figure 14

Figure 13

painted or engraved areas. I imagine a paleolithic frieze as a kind of whirlpool within which the flotsam of inside/outside are spinning toward me. If so, of what did the "shipwreck" consist? In following out the metaphor, I come again to the animal/hominid separation as a catastrophe in the ocean of life, the ramifications of which we have hardly begun to investigate. Inside and outside, in this view, could be seen as the wreckage of an inter-related life vessel. The "spars," ordered, become the vertical/horizontal, or right angle "fix" that is dominant among many equal directions from the time in which the animal was dethroned and domesticated.[3]

As we continue to come forward in time, the animal is gradually cut away from the human figure. I imagine that a whole progression could be elaborated from paleolithic animal-costumed "shamans" to animal-headed Egyptian gods to fully human-appearing Greek gods (some with animal consorts and disguises, others, like Hercules, in battle with man-hating monstrous animals) to Blake's 18th-century water-color, "Glad Day," where the poet displays himself naked and free of all animality, his left foot treading on a worm while a bat-winged spirit, symbolizing evil, flies away. The counter-motion to this progression is the animal spirit, not only become "fabulous" but increasingly less an ally and more a figure of terror and wrath, pounding on our chests in nightmare, as if what we are is a door locked on separation forever.

Charles Olson's vision of the Odyssey as a dance-drama in which a shaman-hero dances his way through a labyrinth of monsters to be reunited with a human other is a fascinating tie-in of so-called prehistory with history, but such a vision also bears the shadow of Hercules out of bond with living animals.[4] By tending to depict animals realistically and himself as a hybrid monster, paleolithic man seems to be in accord with Wallace Stevens' "It is the human that is the alien,/ The human that has no cousin in the moon."

△

I would now like to concentrate on one particularly mysterious and complex paleolithic scene in which a symbiotic narrative seems to be compressed into an instantaneous event (or in which an event is beginning to crumble into sequence). I am referring to the painting at the bottom of the "well" in the depths of Lascaux, probably the last work in the most beautifully painted of all the caves, near Montignac in the French Dordogne. Because I am writing as a poet who has visited the caves and tried to learn something from them, I want to comment on some of the interpretational problems with this scene and then present a poem I have written, which is my response to the scene.

Georges Bataille gives an adequate description of the scene: "midway down, four yards or so below the floor of the Apse, a narrow platform brings one opposite a rock shelf (below which the Well continues to plunge) bearing images, on one side, of a rhinoceros and, on the other, of a bison; between them, falling or supine, is a bird-headed man; below him, a bird poised on an upright stick. The infuriated bison's hair literally stands straight on end, it lashes its tail, intestines spill in thick ropes from a gash in its belly. A spear is painted diagonally across the beast's flank, passing over the place where the wound has been inflicted. The man is naked and ithyphallic: drawn in a puerile fashion, he is shown as though just felled by the bison's two projecting horns; the man's arms are flung wide and his four-fingered hands are open."[5] A few pages later, Bataille writes: "Bison and rhinoceros, man and bird betray the same

Figure 15

touch, the same stroke, the shining black paint is the same, they have the same frosted, rimy look."

Bataille then quotes Abbé Breuil who feels that it is "a painting perhaps commemorating some fatal accident that occurred in the course of a hunt." But Bataille then comments that the bison could

not have been disemboweled by the thrust of the spear, and this fact eliminates both the rhinoceros and the man as the cause of the bison's condition (or possibly makes them both responsible: the man speared the bison down through the anus, and the rhinoceros gored the bison from underneath). Of course none of the interpretation so far takes into consideration that the man has an erection and that the rhinoceros, which might not be involved with the man and the bison (Laming claims that the rhinoceros "does not seem to have been painted with the same hand; nor is the technique similar to that of the other figures.") has six black dots under its raised tail (if they are connected with any other part of the scene) are not depicted as falling, as dung would literally do, but as almost floating toward the perched bird.

Bataille then quotes from Kirchner's interpretation. According to the latter, it is not at all a question of a hunting incident, the prostrate man is not dead; rather he is a medicine-man in the throes of an ecstatic trance. Kirchner, we are told, has drawn on the idea of "a relationship between Lascaux civilization and the Siberian civilization of our own times." A Siberian scene is cited with the sacrifice of a cow; posts topped by carved birds mark the road to heaven, to which the medicine-man will guide the sacrificed animal while he is unconscious (the birds being auxiliary spirits without whom the medicine-man could not undertake his aerial journey).

This interpretation might account for the erection (and also somewhat connects with Giedion's argument that "this bird man is in fact standing upright at the moment of supreme exaltation.") but as Bataille himself points out Kirchner overlooks the bison and his wound; "that is to say, is it probable that, in a sacrifice, a bison would be disemboweled? And has not Kirchner's theory forced him to view the rhinoceros as independent of the rest of the scene? However, if one inspects the actual Scene at Lascaux, one quickly discovers the group's unity and similarity in treatment."

After offering arguments against interpretations of the scene by Pericot, Reinach, and Maringer, La Barre states that he finds Kirchner's most acceptable, "because evidence for totemism is lacking

among Stone Age men, whereas we do have plentiful evidence of shamanistic animal-man relations." Yet La Barre slides into agreement with the traditional hunting incident interpretation when he explains that the scene depicts a "shamanistic 'trickster' who bites off more than he can chew and comes to grief (bird power has no power over a charging bison), a story perhaps of shamanistic rivalry illustrating the inappropriateness and powerlessness of an Orphic bird shaman in the underground world of the reindeer shaman."

Lommel sees the scene as a battle between shamans, "a fight in which only one of the contestants has assumed the shape of an animal."

As I have suggested, the tendency of all the interpretations is to fail to bring the rhinoceros and the six black dots into consideration. While Bataille emphasizes the unity of the scene, even he makes no attempt to connect the bird, perched facing the rhinoceros' anus, with the turds floating toward it. It happens that several spear-throwers carved from antler bones have been discovered which depict an animal, in Leroi-Gourhan's words, "with an enormous sausage of excrement issuing from its posterior orifice, with two birds, at the end of the sausage, tenderly kissing."[6]

It is possible that all the interpretations also suffer from a kind of logical one-sidedness, and all, for the sake of consistency, come away with either a hunter interpretation or a shaman interpretation. Yet there are no actual hunting scenes depicted in paleolithic art and all shaman evidence must be based on fragmentary associations with "primitive" peoples removed by thousands of years from Cro-Magnon. Since there does not appear to be any way to ground a single consistent interpretation, maybe one should try to think about the "well" scene in a different way.

If Cro-Magnon imaginative space is multidirectional unbroken inter-relation without frame or sacred/secular distinction, perhaps the experience displayed in such space is too. I mean, maybe it is time to stop saying that the man in the "well" scene is *either* supine/dreaming *or* supine/dead *or* falling *or* standing in exaltation. Maybe the experience concretized here is all those things at once, so

that the meaning of the scene is not a Rashomon-like situation in which the "truth" is a never completely interlocking mosaic of contrasting viewpoints, but a meaning in which all the associational surfacings fuse into an image capable of bearing the inconsistencies and contradictions that have sapped the power of the interpretational views—

> Fecality wants to be born—
> the fecal nature of the soul offers its berries to this bird
> who will pick life
> from six small hard rhinoceros turds, not
> off the ground, but as semaphoric pairs
> in the depths of Lascaux's
> dry well,
> at the end of 15,000 years of image
> we are *gathered* here, much more than we now
> suspect we are, by black manganese turds containing
> the seeds of narrative, or the berries which
> like that bird we must take in our mouth and chew,
> or like two other birds I know perch
> on a sausage of excrement emerging from a headless
> animal's anus and kiss, or make love
> talk on this little writhing hill of our hunger
> to sound ourselves while falls, suspended above us,
> the shadow of what we are without our hunger
> to mourn a coalescence, a congruity of all we touch
> and distill from it the fundamental substance of the soul—
> look, already our torso is a slack empty loop,
> a kind of lariat falling nowhere, at the top of which
> is the bird head we've desperately put on to stop
> conformity to ourselves, already we are a mask
> atop a watery loop of rope, heartless, organless,
> but not sexless for look, like a gash in motion
> our penis is out, without terminal, out on brown rock,

blackness-bathing, pronged up as if it could
match the uterine hunger of who is that
hovering above this little tentacle, this little
only thing we are putting forth? Looked at
through a star shower of centuries it may be Madam Death,
her forehead buried in her chest, under
her filthy black beard, her hair on end, lashing her tail
as if she could fit
on us, with her uterine loops sounding
like bells under water the labyrinth of our already
organless dream—or is she another like us,
got up in trance, the soul of smallpox, or mange,
or the sheer soul of our itch
to merge with a dug and forestall
the unfolding of this tight bud in which
the raised rhinoceros tail is pressed to the little bird's
cheek inside of which is my head my whole stiff body
a lance to which the womb and the colon are one
mass, thus kangaroo sac in which the fluid
I am giving off is the fluid I am taking in, and my eyes
half-filled green windows, the brown-green liquor
a rolling sea in the brine emptiness of this well,
now rotating rhinoceros to bird to man, as the heart
tinkers with forever in the chance of putting
out while drawing in an intestinal body hard as a diamond,
an outline inside of which the sour mash of this old,
old heart, certainly mixed with brains, with the dust
of brayed skulls, and buried in the semblance of blood,
is a said part of the spirits hurling lances through
my body asleep at the bottom of this well, to remake my body,
to give me the vixen power to insert stones into others,
to liberate me from having only wind to pierce, woman to
pierce, bison to wear and that is why

I am talking to you this way, column down through death
in which I hurtle both ways, and in the both ways at once
to generate story, to make the bison teach me how to dance
their slow swaying dance through which the shadows
of myself begin to emerge, which I pin to signs, to the paths
I am lost between, umbilical hoses, to make this substance,
this showing, this between, emerge, monster to stop
the cascade of separating ends, yet weaving the separations,
splitting the very ends I am mourning never having
been born, to die in the stomach of my mother
barren
but for my foetal jungle.

△

Footnotes

1. *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Farrar Straus, 1976, p. 452.

2. Robert Ardrey, *The Hunting Hypothesis*, Bantam, 1977, p. 175.

3. S. Giedion, *The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art*, Pantheon, 1962, pp. 5-6; see also pp. 273-74.

4. *Olson 10*, University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, 1978, p. 91.

5. Georges Bataille, *Lascaux Or The Birth of Art*, Skira, 1955, pp. 110 and 140. Other "well" scene interpretations presented here are from: Annette Laming, *Lascaux*, Penguin, 1959, pp. 93-96; Giedion, p. 508; Weston La Barre, *The Ghost Dance*, Delta, 1978, pp. 417-19; Andreas Lommel, *The World of the Early Hunters*, Evelyn, Adams & Mackay, London, 1967, p. 128. I visited Lascaux in 1974 and 1978 but was not shown the "well" scene.

6. André Leroi-Gourhan, *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*, Abrams, 1967, p. 64.

Figure 1: engraved slab (vulva) from Abri Cellier in the Museum at Les Eyzies, France; reproduced in Leroi-Gourhan, p. 404.

Figure 2: engraved slab (with animal head, vulva and strokes) from Abri Cellier; in the museum at Les Eyzies; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 404.

Figure 3: engraved slab (quadruped, vulva, and dots) from La Ferrassie in the

Museum at Les Eyzies; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 404.

Figure 4: ceiling of a large chamber in Pech-Merle, near Cabrerets, France, with woman, mammoth, and meanders; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 421.

Figure 5: wall at Pech-Merle, with negative hand accompanied by dots; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 139.

Figure 6: wall at El Castillo, near Santander, Spain, with quadrangular sign accompanied by a row of dots; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 140.

Figure 7: drawing of hybrid creature from Los Casares, near Guadalajara, Spain; Philip Van Doren Stern, *Prehistoric Europe*, Norton, 1969, p. 160.

Figure 8: drawing of hybrid creature from Les Combarelles, Les Eyzies; Stern, p. 161.

Figure 9: animalized human profile from Commarque, near Les Eyzies; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 430.

Figure 10: bas-relief sculpture of the "Venus" of Laussel, near Les Eyzies (the piece is in a private collection in Bordeaux); Leroi-Gourhan, p. 406.

Figure 11: the "Venus" from Lespugue, Haute-Garonne, France; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 406.

Figure 12: the "Venus" from Willendorf, Austria; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 406.

Figure 13: section from the wall in the "sanctuary" at Les Trois Frères, near St.-Giron, France, showing actual profusion of animals among which a hybrid human figure emerges; drawing by Henri Breuil in *Les Cavernes du Volp*, by Bégouën and Breuil, Arts et Métiers Graphiques, Paris, 1958, p. 56.

Figure 14: detail from same section in photo 13, with all figures and lines eliminated except the hybrid human, the half-bison and the half-stag.

Figure 15: the "well" at Lascaux; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 414.

This essay was originally presented at the conference on "Forms and Functions of the Narrative," sponsored by The Center for the Humanities, at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, in May, 1981.

△

Pierre Joris

The Broken Glass

1.

last night
you found
a wine
glass weird-
ly broken not
a chip & not a
crack a near
perfect
break a
round of glass
½" thick
as if cut,
the rim
ring I called
no way
could we have
thrown the glass
away
it stands
on my desk
the rim-ring
rests
vertically
on the glass a
circular band
a 90 degree angle
against the glass
a mere circumference
dipped
into its past volume
one
edge smooth-
ly sanded down
jagged
break-line what
does it
where does it
if it does
it does!
mean I
mean connect
with our lives
this broken glass
strangely un-
broken
this glass
merely took
its rim away
freed its
mouth
from ours.

2.

after the glass you
found broken by
itself somehow
I broke
a pot, vessel of
earth, clay pot reddish
outside un-
glazed finish fired
in slow coal ember heat
does not — did not (
I have
to remember it'
s broken now) hold
water, held
when it slipped
a ring
of yours —
but was more
than that
was the round
berber pot whose
circular rim
had four corners
climbed up
tight chalice steps
meant to hold candles —
did not hold water
held fire in
stead light
a light of four
candles up
to our
nights.
One
candle arm
broke.
Clay
mixed with rougher earth
pebbles some
glass shards entombed
at center raw core
the fire

up-
ended it
stands
on my desk
next to yesterday's
broken glass.
I don't know
what it, again, does it
mean.
Means.
for what . to what
end no longer
in sight.
march events.
all ways
find the way
(find my way
pick it carefully
out from under
the shards
to the text
to the heart of
the text-
ure of my life the road
is littered
with broken objects.

It's turning

into obsession, this
transparent solid I'm
trying to make yield
to force to birth
sense into my
writing hand.

3.

The shape
retained
beyond
accident.

The rim-less
glass
still holds
water.

Knife
sharp edge un-
polished
rim re-

verses function:
put my lips
to the empty
glass

fill it
with me,
blood of
my mouth

lips
cut
to overflowing

it will fill
with words
methedrine
nights

bled
into this
vessel this cup I
have tried

not to call
can no longer
not call
a grail

a rimless cup
pure crystal thus
totally transparent
invisible.

To find it
you have to
fill it not
with water

not with
transparent
wine, put
your lips to it

then when full
of you
you finally

see it.

The grail is when
you see yourself
in the glass.

You don't see
the glass.
The cut doesn't
hurt much.

The knights could not
find it. They thought
it would show itself
in great pain.

The pain is before
or after. The grail
is frail. Glass is
in between.

4.

the clear ring
of purpose

which is more
than I can pretend to
that clarity always has
eluded me
have had to hold on
to the various objects
have focused my obsessions
— to go with them
that much faith
I have at times
mustered —
that the obsession
leads me on
will eventually lead me
out, that there is more
than meets the eye.
A broken glass
meets the eye.
A wound happens,
to be healed
to be whole again
to stave off decomposition
to contain
the hole inside.

Shall I send it can
I send this ring
down there?
This glass can it
become lens
let me see
what is going on.

The rim ring settles
around the hole
contains it
keeps it
from spreading
for awhile.

March 80 and January 81

Will Alexander

Australian X-Ray Painting

Not only has no Australian plant been cultivated as a source of human food, but no Australian animal has ever become domesticated in the service of man.

—ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA

BURSTING WITH INTERIOR DEATH LIQUID, the lungs stumble forward a millibar a minute, so that progress is slow, from the dark of the skull to the steps of the eye, like army worms or baby farming, the death liquid moves, detected by rays 'less than 2 angstroms', wasting of primordial innards, land mass dogma laid out in frog holes, that bloat up and burst broadcasting blood fear, from the zones of the dunes to Tasmanian Eucalypti, fever is caught slicing lungs with a sand blade, a mirage of vagueness dances through the eyescope, colonial lepers with lesions the length of spotted pine cone lizards, the task at hand, chasing the soul through electron vacuums, placing its parts with amorphous precision, the skull swells, the nose peels, the flag turns rotten, the x-ray catches the soul by its letters, the image of Australia vague, its land bridge to Asia busted, its lungfish feeds on burning football tundra, and the old and the new fuse for an instant in an isolated shark's head that breaks apart while dreaming, keeping serpents awake for a million rusted air bag hours, the emu and the murup dive like flightless land mass deserts, the illness

lingers and lives without air weight, the lungs stopped up but breathing through memory, Australia, limitless outback phantom, grasping at the fur of the koala, at its bones, at its billowy shadowy shadow, trying to deduce its sluggish stage bell mystery, coming up empty, the continent empty, its psyche x-ray charted, its soul sucked out of its marrow, sickness swims in reconstructed virtue, unrestricted jumping mice abound with teeth of frozen microscopic nuggets, which turn to monotreme mammals, platypus inscriptions read: desert for certain eyeless buzzards loaded on treacherous midnight salads, and Australia in its root eye stays nameless, without retreat to its deepest name brand centers, the message of the x-ray keeps repeating its blankness, answerless, without palpable connective between appearance and body, night watch trap, egg bone encasement, from which nothing dislodges, nothing gets lost, but which spins from outward throat stamp pennies getting spun by interior sun rash cycles, the wound of light glowing backwards, scorpion bladders emitting their shadows, from the center of death and the flightless 'dunes fixed with Triodia', the lifeless compost heaves, spits mangy green bundles of liquid, that float to the outside, plant themselves as kangaroo totems on northeastern Queensland, and shrink and change to non-returning boomerang razors, that go west, cutting the skin, tearing the teeth, its life, a hard malefic dream world pattern, where emus dance on broken burial grates, which do not exist in the open eyed liquid of floating physical slaughter, that lives in the trees, in the wind, hostile infusoria driven away by empty ancestors' dreaming, dreaming, the second component of waking, the pre-existing soul, the sperm-fish egg brought together in life, Wondjina hero spirits turn ghost and travel, leave timeless imprints of darkness, central Australian moon beam syndrome, deathless, primordial, like the death liquid phantom, creeping from the lungs, a millibar a minute, coming forward and stopping, sinking its soul in the timeless

Hector Manjarrez

from: El Golpe Avisa

—translated by Nathaniel Tarn

Bogota Blues

The airport is surrounded by immobile multicolored
metal birds shrinking the Andes.
I'm admiring a pregnant woman with a winged throat
and sumptuous porcelain breasts
whose companion checks me out from time to time
as if she, so melancholic and desirable,
and I, so sick of it all and a boor,
had gotten it together
when he'd gone off to the duty-free bazaar.

I am no more to her than a spectator
of her still statue.

Adios, Bogota of my never never loves.
Adios, brats who never got to rob my watch.
Everything goes the way it was agreed on years ago.

October Fest

That beauty of yours, you sweated it out,
you cried it out,
it went to hell—
you're a skeleton puppet
of the Day of the Dead with your mane on the wind.
You lost your adolescence,
that radiant innocence
treasured with all the meanness
of an anal-retentive child.

Now you choose freedom whenever I dream
you're jumping the wall of my fortress to rape me.
Fly, run, make an art of your flight, skeleton:
I won't catch up with you for this hundred-meters
but in other places
I'll take the short cuts
to your wet, stinking pelts.

32

And you sleep in the arms of your saturnine beauty
devastated by pain
so that you can give it a shine
sudden and opaque like.
What a waste you are at times in my arms
crippled by your magnificence.
Let me smell you, oktyabr.

Here We Go Again

And now death is solemn and familiar
like a black cat

yes
an alien way of putting it
but I understand

if I were to cry out
I wouldn't believe myself
I have lost my voice
and earned
a perfect solitude I don't accept.

Vespers

Now is the time of unutterable tenderness
for having been spoken so many times
for not knowing how to grant it
for the horror of not feeling it
because only saliva will soothe wounds.

When bodies stop that terrible swaying
and kneel down to pose
for an impressionist painting
pain comes back to birth like the most beloved of the dead
unexpected photo of oneself
alone on the bridge of a ship
or waiting for a blindingly white

plane
not knowing who you can cry to
trapped between Tolstoy's Natasha and
Gone with the Wind.

People are buying Christmas presents,
drunks recover their disdain for the law
and the void wrapped
and millions of cars gangrene our feelings.
In the morning
your body of musk and amber
is nature lost
city regained.

Iskra, Iskra

Pain eroded your flesh
and I, the razor,
see in your wise, delirious gaze
a meadow on fire
lining the woods of your body.

My drinking water.
On your shoulders the shining light
of those who get back from the wilderness.

Lima Waltz

When I got here I came as a brother:
another one of those who threads thru the eye
of the needle that mends catastrophes
                if the pulse holds
and the camel agrees to enter
the ark of the community
                after those he wanted to follow
but before he was ready.

This is when commitments are destroyed
taken up as little pledges
                of history,
and this is the dismantling city
where objects fall apart at a touch.

O repulsive little Pretty Babies of Miraflores,
oligarchic walkuries not even the Latin ass
                manages to humanize,
O sorry half-breeds tyrannical and gloomy
O Barranco
                Bridge of Sighs:
if I ever get back to you it'll be in the summer
and we'll adore the one and only
                true king the sun
in a dazzling body-to-body clinch.

Traveller, Hold Me Back

Bottles, cigarette butts, full wastepaperbasket,
the sun setting in the angle of your armpit,
one of my poems nailed to the wall,

photos of him,
the mirror you see yourself in every morning,
twined vipers of 16mm.
your books thinking,
a woman's place.

A year ago I got you *"A Room of One's Own"*

Poor, great Virginia,
her name proclaims it and in those days
it wasn't possible to be intelligent
and keep pleasure also.

Hector Manjarrez was born in Mexico D.F. in October 1945. He lived in Europe from 1962 to 1970, especially in London where he worked for the B.B.C. and the Cultural Section of the Mexican Embassy. His first book of short stories, *Acto Propiciatorio*, was published by Joaquin Mortiz in 1970. There followed a number of novels including *Lapsus*, which was a finalist in the Biblioteca Breve Awards, and *Introitus. El Golpe Avisa*, from which these poems come, was published by Alacena/Era in 1977. He now lives in Mexico City where he does editorial work and is one of the publishers of *La Mesa Llena*, a new literary magazine.

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The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson

Introduction: Part II

An Unravelling Friendship (1949-1950)

Edited by Paul Christensen

Literary friendships in America grow up around a change, and break apart again when the change is over. Friendships, like those between Emerson and Whitman, Melville and Hawthorne, Pound and Williams, Dahlberg and Olson, are necessary in facing the literary unknown. Unlike nature, with its slow growth and decay, literature stalls for unpredictably long periods of time and then leaps through a radical transformation almost without warning. The critical reception of change is usually rancorous, even hysterical, since much of the mechanism and procedure of criticism must perish with the new. The friendship between Dahlberg and Olson was created by such a change at mid-century in spite of the obvious differences in their characters. Dahlberg was a classicist who hated the post-Hellenic West for its corruption of Attic standards; Olson was a primitivist who thought the world had been fractured by the rise of Mediterranean civilizations, and who saw the world becoming one again as the Hellenic mind receded from Western life. This did not prevent Olson from wishing to master the Greco-Roman tradition, however; he engaged Dahlberg in a high-spirited rivalry by reading deeply in classical literature and bandying its references in his letters—and Dahlberg responded to these challenges with brilliance and energy.

Their friendship enriched both men. Olson learned much from Dahlberg's unique prose style, in which the scatter of life was shaped and enlivened by the magnetic powers of myth and parable; Dahlberg had mastered an allusive language that made his own existence resonant with an-

cient archetypes. Each coaxed the other to make fuller use of what Jung had discovered as the myth-making propensities of the unconscious—which older civilizations had already dredged to the surface. As Olson remarked to Dahlberg, "The past is prologue." For Dahlberg, the past was absolute, but this difference of opinion was ignored. It is likely that Olson's preoccupation with Melville from 1932 onwards led Dahlberg away from writing versions of his autobiography to the critical essays on American literature that began with *Do These Bones Live* (1941). Olson's perceptions about Melville's themes of ambition and isolation prompted Dahlberg to seek wider explanations for his own sufferings as an American Jew. The wrongs felt by Dahlberg were not unique to one man's life or even to one ethnic group, but rather were root and branch the evils of the American ethos—America was an anti-Eden, the desert of Adam, Cain and Job, with whom Dahlberg identified himself. Whatever the literary change of mid-century was, it seemed to reopen the roots of the Western past to contemporary artists, and their uses of this past—mythic, ideological, and critical—gave the pattern to new writing. It was their sense of an ending to Western life that made both men think deeply about its achievements and its roots and origins.

But each man had a separate sense of what the end of Western tradition might mean. For Dahlberg, it meant the dissolution of the world and the end of culture. In praising *Call Me Ishmael*, Dahlberg chose to ignore Olson's closing argument, that Ishmael would arise from the disaster of the *Pequod* to bring about a new age of fellowship. Instead, Dahlberg only perceived Olson's book as a recognition of his own worst fears and criticisms of the modern West. His narrow judgment of the book foreshadowed the major issue dividing them: Dahlberg insisted on believing that the West was rushing to oblivion, while Olson maintained that the West was coming to the end of a great cycle after which it would be whole again. Dahlberg could only think of contemporary cities as the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Old Testament, and his stance turned him away from modern culture toward a vision that restated the values and morality of the ancient world. His own experience was only useful as a base metal with which to make the alloy of his myths, parables, and allusions to the Western past. Dahlberg had been reading Blake during the period of these letters and mentions him to Olson as an example of his own literary methods.

Dahlberg saw only a contemporary wasteland from which nothing would

grow; it was a desert relieved only by the ruins of the past. Olson believed in change, in the fertility of new ideas and new forms of expression. The issue came to a clash when Olson sent Dahlberg a copy of his poems, *Y & X* (1948); under the conventions of their correspondence, Dahlberg should have praised them, and only after, in asides, offered useful criticism. But in his January 18, 1949 letter, he writes awkwardly, opening his letter by telling Olson, "It is a deep pain to wound you. I send you my words out of the fat darkness of obscurity." He saw Pound's influence on the poems and distrusted Olson's technique; as he remarked to Olson, the difference between *Call Me Ishmael* and *Y & X* is "the ultimate distinction between Edward Dahlberg and Ezra Pound." Dahlberg's next letter is even less inclined toward the poems. It is clear he did not like free verse or experimental poetry, in which he saw reflected the disintegration of contemporary life. But Dahlberg was nervous about his counsel and apologized for his indifference; in later letters he compensated by praising Olson's talent, not his execution of the poems. By August 3, 1949, he told Olson "They are gifted, as I know you are, for my Muse long ago advised me so; but I am still praying that you will return to some of the traditional forms of writing." Dahlberg feared that in such poetry Olson might be slipping away from him, and his tone with Olson is politic. His conflicting feelings over *Y & X* are interesting to follow in the letters; here friendship was more at stake than literature, but a decade later, Dahlberg unleashed his invective and disgust on modern literature in epistolary essays to Herbert Read, published as *Truth Is More Sacred* (1961). The title is from Socrates, "Truth is more sacred than friendship," which vigorously negated the attitude of his letters to Olson.

Although the clues are minor and erratic, the unravelling of a friendship is made increasingly evident as these letters progress. The common ground between the friends was rapidly shrinking. Their letters began to skirt the sensitive issues of form and vision; more emphasis is placed on simply working and living, and less on ideas, techniques, or experiments, the very things Olson wanted most to formulate. Olson announced the publication of "The Kingfishers" and his essay "Projective Verse" with few details, and did not send him copies of them. Dahlberg had proved himself a difficult confidant in matters of new poetry, and it is likely their friendship would have ended even without the later arguments over *The Flea of Sodom.* Even so, Dahlberg continued to inspire Olson through his letters, which were much

more artfully composed than Olson's, and were intended to demonstrate his powers as a writer. Olson was always impressed, but Dahlberg would coyly dismiss them as poorly jotted off. Choicer phrases from Dahlberg's letters were often recycled to other correspondents; Dahlberg worked hard on his letters because they were bids for Olson's continued admiration and friendship. On at least one occasion, Olson generated a poem from his correspondence with Dahlberg; "The Laughing Ones" emerged first as prose in his November 18, 1949 letter; but earlier in their letters Olson sent Dahlberg his poem "Tanto E Amara," which he never published, but which Dahlberg liked enough to quote from later.*

Throughout these letters, Dahlberg was readying *The Flea of Sodom* for publication, of crucial importance to him since he had not published a new work since 1941. Olson was his enthusiastic supporter, who tried unsuccessfully to publish the work at Black Mountain College; Olson initially liked the work and praised chapters as they arrived from Dahlberg. As the book neared the end of production, Olson began demurring from Dahlberg's request that he review it in the New York *Times*. Olson hints that the work is hard for him to read—either because the author was too intimately his friend, or because of the density of Dahlberg's images and parables. In no case did Dahlberg think these sufficient reasons not to publicly endorse the work, and he persisted in asking Olson to arrange to write a review. The dilemma of their friendship had become two-fold: Dahlberg could not praise Olson's poems, and Olson could not express his feelings about *The Flea of Sodom*—as writers, the situation would soon become intolerable.

In Olson's journal about visiting Pound, published as *Charles Olson & Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeths*, Olson occasionally admits he "decided to stay mum" instead of disagree with Pound; this same attitude prevailed with Dahlberg. Several times the journal bears out that Olson associated Pound's obsessive mind with Dahlberg: "Once in a while," Olson wrote of Pound, "he seems to speak with an obsession, . . . I think of Dahlberg already." (P. 40) Later he commented,

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* "Tanto e Amara" was first published by this editor in an essay, " 'Edward, My Edward': Charles Olson's Letters to Edward Dahlberg," *The Library Chronicle* (U. Texas/Austin), 14 (1980), 46-65.

> The big machinery of the word, press, radio, movies is horrible. But as in so much, he fights as aesthete and as anarchist like Ed[ward Dahlberg]. I say, it is an interim, a death of 3000 years. I'll live on into what's up. Black as it is I'll keep red through it.
>
> (P. 83)

The identification of Dahlberg with Pound was ominous; it meant Olson would ultimately have to leave Dahlberg for the same reason he had quit Pound: an elder's tyrrany and obsessive hatred. As he later wrote to Robert Creeley, "I suspect all clarities which lead to hatred." Olson had twice found himself the patient Ishmael of a literary Ahab, and he was tiring of it. What Olson had not counted on was meeting Robert Creeley, a younger writer without claims on the world and without a superior edge over him. Four months into their correspondence, which began in April, 1950, Olson wrote to his friend, Henry A. Murray, "Creeley and I have since engaged in perhaps the most important correspondence of my life." (*Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), I, p. ix). Creeley was only twenty-three at the time, and except for an initial rebuff to Olson's submission of several poems for a planned journal, the exchange took off as a mutual inquiry into the making of a new literature, in which Olson found the first real sympathy and corroboration for his ideas. He did not need "to stay mum" any longer; Creeley explored Olson's arguments with careful attention and wrote replies that were not only complimentary but collaborative, as with his famous formulation that "form is the extension of content" which Olson incorporated into "Projective Verse."

For obvious reasons, Olson did not boast of Creeley to Dahlberg, but emotional complication had set in among Olson's friendships—which had now become a confused network of literary alliances. His correspondence with Creeley from April to September 1950 alone fills two volumes of *The Complete Correspondence*; in October of that year another prolific correspondence would begin with the editor of *Origin*, Cid Corman. As disagreements strained his friendship with Dahlberg, Olson shifted the alliance to Creeley and Corman, who supported his conceptions of new writing. On September 11, 1950, Creeley wrote to Olson comparing *Call Me Ishmael* to *The Flea of Sodom*, finding the first "Clean. Fine. Great thing," and *The Flea* an "unreadable style," "a waste/ of time, etc." "Sick, sick bk/

man. Don't enjoy it/ who the fuck is supposed to. As tho: this man were only: the sore." (II, pp. 136-138) On August 24, 1950, Olson wrote to tell Creeley they ("thee and me") were the "new born," who wished to be saved "from nostalgia." On October 18, 1950, in his first letter to Cid Corman, Olson wrote of Robert Creeley, "Look: so far, in my short experience (that is, as writer) I have found only one man who has JUDGMENT in these matters the equal of what I take to be the DEMAND of our going reality. That lad you know." ("Letters for Origin," ed. Albert Glover, Diss. SUNY: Buffalo, 1968, page 2). Five months later, Olson would tell Corman that he thought Dahlberg "profoundly wrong (which is a great way to be, if you can't be profoundly right." ("Letters," p. 47) Olson wanted to see books that were the "opposite of Dahlberg," he told Corman, and to see Socrates and Christ "not as heroes but as devils." (P. 47) But none of this was ever communicated to Dahlberg; Olson could not quite bring himself to such a confrontation; when he attacked Dahlberg, as he would do later, it was in rebuttal to Dahlberg's ferocious verbal assaults. It was to others of his circle that Olson obliquely confessed his misgivings with his mentor. Much later, in August, 1950, Olson wrote to Corman, then in Kyoto, Japan, to say, among other things, that he agreed with Robert Duncan's review of Dahlberg's *The Sorrows of Priapus* (1957) in the April, 1959 issue of *Poetry*—in which Duncan concludes that Dahlberg's doctrines lay "in the set of his mind against the living."

Dahlberg was more forthright and sincere throughout the crisis and breakdown of their friendship; he was the first to confess bad feelings, critical disapproval, changes of heart, depths of passion, whereas Olson seemed to have a mercurial personality that kept hidden certain feelings. Olson could be imperious, gentle, reserved, outrageous—depending on the correspondent and the occasion; but no matter to whom Dahlberg wrote, he created the same grave, histrionic, suffering, passionate persona, who fought the world to preserve the ancient standards of life and art. Dahlberg candidly announced his new friendship with Sir Herbert Read, who in time replaced Olson as his comrade. Read fulfilled Dahlberg's needs as much as Creeley did Olson's: he saw through the publication of *The Flea of Sodom*, where Olson had failed; he shared some of Dahlberg's convictions, although he professed more moderate denials of modernism; he wrote appreciative forewords to Dahlberg's books, whereas Olson had demurred. As Dahlberg

and Olson drifted apart, they closed around them new circles of friends, all the while attempting to preserve their old camaraderie of the late 1930s.

Both men considered the world a shambles of disorderly cultures, wretched politics, hypocritical arts, ruined friendships, vacant lives—the tasteless void of industrial society, which the past could cure and redeem if brought back to life in the liveliest form and language. Dahlberg was the darker visionary of the two and reserved the past for himself and the few who cared to penetrate his oblique prose; Olson saw the past returning of its own cyclical accord, in which the artist could participate by the right use of his whole mind. But these visionaries of a lost fellowship could not salvage their own friendship, even though their work concentrated on the ethics of community. The irony of their situation never fully occurred to either man.

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[postcard] [New York City]
Oct. 19, 48

Dear Charles:

I would be very grateful if you could send me ten dollars by return mail. In a few weeks I hope to be out of dollar difficulties: Would that I could get that devil out of my life—would that I had the asses & oxen of Jacob.

It is a pulsing felicity to hear how good Black Mt is for both of you, & that it is the physic you need. I know few delights more tender to me than to serve your Muse & your imperial necessities. I am at 193 Waverly Place; should you get there, on the sudden, as I surmise you will, & I am out, leave a note & tell me where I can reach you—I see people & so dissolve the pinching ache & the gall.

Both you & Constanza have my love—

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
October 29, 1948

My dear Charles:

I have had no word from you and pray that you and Constanza are not having hardships. I want to thank you again for sending me the ten dollars so promptly. I am concerned over my debt to Sam Rosenberg, but so far have not been able to dissolve my debts here. I had to borrow money from the chairman to get through the month.

I write no one but you, my sometime spouse, and her Cape Cod lawyer, a fine and stygian triune. Of the three you alone have my healing word as doleful and wanting as it is.

I continue to read; it is my sole balsam. I am trying to find another room. Where I live at present is the house of Sodom, the man who lets out the rooms being a half-dame from the plains of Gomorrah.

Nothing came of the publishing incident. The head of the firm said he did not have enough learning to read the manuscript and that he could not afford to print a book for a private audience, you, Constanza, Sam Rosenberg and three other maimed and sorrowing spirits who read and petition heaven for three privy readers.

Tell me, please, whether you have shelter and what you and Constanza are going to do.

I do earnestly hope to see you soon.

Love to you and Constanza.

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[postcard]

[New York City]
Oct. 30, 48

Dear Charles:—I am very hindered. Whenever it seems I might see

my Geoffrey, my letter does not get to my erstwhile spouse, or you disappear. I phoned you yesterday & was told the phone was disconnected. I sent a letter to you to her lawyer trying to make arrangements to see Geoffrey. You, Charles, are the breathing witness of my love unto cracked distraction for Geoffrey. Please put an air mail stamp on the letter to her Cape Cod lawyer. Get it there, with Mercury's golden sandal, I beg you! & let me know where you are. I cannot even receive my mail so desperately needful at the instant. My tears fall on dry potsherds. I must keep my N.Y. residence a secret: otherwise I would not bother you. I still hope to form a group with Herbert Read & in which I deeply include you. A letter came from him today, giving me the name of 2 anarchists who have a press. He is working for publication of the book. Be sure you will be printed when you are ready! Read writes in despair of the "fat, pussy times":—"We vent our indignation (if we have your prophetic force) on a seething mass far too preoccupied with its own dissolution to turn an ear to our lamentations." If you are my friend, as I have ever been yours, [ ], I entreat you to get my letters to the baleful Scylla, the state of Mass. And let me know where you are!

Your loving and deeply torn friend
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Hand-written note at bottom of a form letter from Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, dated October 25, 1948 from Dean Erich Hausmann asking correspondent to complete a "Personnel Blank."]

[New York City]

Dear Charles:—It was deeply good of you to phone me—I go now, I think, to 143 Lexington Ave—phone—Mu 3-0019. You say nothing of Sam Rosenberg; please assure him as soon as I can make some stable life for myself. If I hadn't taken those accursed planes I could

have sent my wife money—I am quite sick about the whole thing, so heart-wounding—
Please mail this to her lawyer as soon as you can. Tell me how you came out of your own eviction turmoil. Do you have a roof, & do I have a mailbox in Washington!
[As ?] we sing, "when shepherds pipe on oaten straw", if we could—

When will the Poems be printed—
I read & lament & walk—

All my love to you & Constanza,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[postcards] [Broadway Central Hotel, New York City]

Send all mail, Charles, to Broadway-Central Hotel, Broadway & 3rd St. Am staying there now.

Dear Charles:—

Evidently none of my letters are getting through—I sent you [two?], & one to the lawyer in Hyannis. I phoned yesterday, using a subterfuge, & learned he has not received a letter sent out a week ago to you. If Constanza has the letter, please don't mail it. I want to rewrite it.

I *must* have, Charles, a Washington address or some city other than N.Y., so as to conceal my whereabouts & at the same time be able to negotiate. If I am ever to see my son Geoffrey, I must get my mail through to the lawyer *now*. Otherwise, it means denial, the rack, & unpurging lamentation. Please see my friend if there is not some way.—

There was no talk of lowering salaries; on the contrary, Albers was going to increase them.

How deeply it pleases me to hear the Poems are at last to be born,

or at least to have the ripening light. Nothing comes, Charles, of the Straus encounter. I want very much to return my MS, but have no copy. I wrote you yesterday Read wrote a very sweet letter. You, Read & I will yet, alongside others, form a group to publish our work. Any thing that heaven sends me must include you—All my love to you & Constanza—ever.

& please answer right away, so I can begin negotiations with the lawyer. And give me an address, please. Not knowing where you were, & not being able to consummate anything was a bleak destroying angel for me for a week. I was reft of reason. If I could yield up that fetid spectre, & keep my senses, if I could—I would not rave on bitumen & asphalt—

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Monday afternoon Nov 22 [1948]

Edward—

The enclosed in the afternoon mail.

I returned from BM yesterday morn: our friends here brought over paintings & Crosby contributed [ ] & the 1st 2 copies of Y & X. So today we have a little money to stave off the summons & hold our house, for the moment. With the BM money I can begin to go ahead.

The goods will be sent to you paid. They are boxed & ready: done by Mme Bodky—and yr "bete," Jackson! All that is required is word from you direct to Ted Dreier. He asked me to ask you to say to him where you wanted them sent. I hope that pleases you.

And soon we must both get free of difficulties & have the chance to let breath & words in. For now

My love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
November 25, 1948

My dear Charles, –

Thank you deeply for your note. I take joy in your book of verse and wait to have a copy inscribed by you, my dearest friend. My sole physic has been reading; I have seen many people, but I go out to be entertained to find that I am the entertainer. Tonight I see a group of painters and sculptors. I am taking Berenice Abbott, the photographer. She should do a camera-portrait of you! I don't particularly care for the one on the dust-jacket of the book. It appeals to me because I am so fond of you; this sentence I shall not consummate as I see you grinning and making ready to pierce me with some bodkin word or other.

Maybe, today, I will find a typist who can make a few copies of the FLEA, and then send you one. I am so pleased that the books are going to be sent and to be paid for by Black Mountain College. O that is a benediction, a beaker of brine. Thank you, my bow to you and to Albers.

In a month or two I will begin fumbling with the Word. What my surging soul so pines to do I fear to begin.

The other day I read that Paris was reared by a hind, – a lovely legend that succored me for days, and is in the season of my own spirit and hungers.

It is very good of my bete noir Jackson to take care of the books. Give my oaf, my imp, my trauma, my gratitude; tell him he begins to know learning and has an occult being that Ben Jonson would have reckoned to be mineral for his pen.

Do I laugh? ay, it is the smarting laughter that rends the bowels. I know no other simple save lamentation.

Many times I have been sorely tempted to go to Washington to spend a day with you, but I cannot afford to do it. I still owe you ten dollars. What has become of our giant of Anak, our six-fingered man

of vision of Gaza, Samuel Rosenberg? You are much too silent; let us have prayers and divulgations. I owe him money, too, and were it not that I have been sending dollars to Winifred I would have paid you and him. Forgive me for being so laggard.

When do I get the POEMS? You know what a sack of cupidity I am for a book, particularly one by you. This will be a second contemporary volume I have read in a decade. The first one was by an author named Charles Olson.

Does Constanza flourish? When will you get here. You know how it is in America, you are either au courant, or in the gutter; and so I have to make a valiant combat for my life, and I have by necromancy and the help of heaven to whom I have given such bootless orisons, gotten to know people. The women I have met have tried to snare me. Imagine a woman so infatuate as not to have sufficient lore of her own organs to know that she does not have to be any more guileful than she was ordained to be by nature. It is very droll, and very drying, to watch a woman employ stratagems. Oh what impotencies come from such an arid well!

All my love to you and Constance. I remain at the Broadway Central Hotel, so please write me here. Should I by mischance find another room I will send you a telegram or have that fleeting pleasure of speaking to you over the telephone.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington D.C.]
Wed [December ? 1948]

My dear Ed:

I have just written a note to Albers to tell him I arrive Monday morning at his whistle stop. And Jeremiah save us—I look forward to it! What do you say to that, maestro? But I'm nix on settlin' there.

Too thin for steady wear. Dehn and I descend on the place like archangels and go away like banana skins, and it is better that way. But it won't last, alas. And I need—o I need—their gold. (We have held the house. Friends raised 50 dollars, and that bone stopped the yap of Madame Bartlett and agent and court but yesterday down they came again with a 175 slap. And as for clothes I am at that point from which there is no turning, I look as bohemian as I did in the village, aetat 1940. Not to speak of the butcher.) How do you fare, brother?

You should not be mortally grieved. You know me, Brer Fox. Name's Possum. And been mighty behind (and white) these many months. I got back to this desk and several uninterrupted days last week and feel properly chagrinned, for a change. (I have not your management, most gifted friend! of language or of life, those *ars.* For me to be a knife takes too much whetting. Enough.)

But I do some things. Yr mss., for example, went off five minutes after it came, to one of the three, the 1st & most commercial. All we can do is light candles by aloes. "This incongruous world of ours", sd Herman Melville, as of his tale of one, Budd. —I shall let you know the result the moment I hear. I imagine it'll be some weeks. You did not include RATIONAL T. Unless you are rewriting it, I think it would be better to present that too. I do not want to see you put off by the slides they used on me—too slight to make a book. Fat slices, that's what the porcine want, eh?

We are heating the house with wood, to avoid starting the cost of coal, and the smell is lovely, and if I were about my own work I might feel like a New England Orpheus. But I'm busy trying to make 40 dollars, writing a review of three new books on Melville, one of which will interest you, F. Barron Freeman's edition of BILLY BUDD, in which he prints for the first time the original version, the longer one. It is a third as long and has all the celerity the "novel" lacks, rotted as it is by that sad, sad notion of poor Melville's that Hawthorne was the better man. What a blight that spinster needle was on his hebraic imagination! —You know how long I have stooped and gone

aside on BILLY BUDD. It is satisfying now to have a version I can read, to be able to speak of a short story with enough respect to mention it in the same breath with Benito Cereno or Bartleby. The curious thing is, how Hawthorne is the tree that brought forth sodom fruit in Melville's ground, and crowded out his own Saul-David root; Hawthorne to Christ to the pain of the sentences of billy budd, Novel, is the dying off of a giant, a giant out of Samuel bred down to christian by a Nathaniel out of Salem. It is a dread, dread story, a fable, Edward, should be told to children of a golden age as warning. "Go not, with your flesh, to men of little blood." What is your wondrous quote, is it from Heraclitus, that to take thought is to thicken the blood around the heart?

I must go back to it. It is a delight to write to your ear.

And keep me informed of yourself. It was a very deep pleasure to talk to you last week and to have your delightful letter. You are resilient and you keep speech in your mouth like myrrh. I am glad for your sake as for mine. It is yr fatherhood.

Constanza returns your greetings. She is fine except for some peculiar pain and sense of calcification in the vertebra at the neck which her weeks in bed seem to have left her with. I too have trouble in the same region (without her cause) and live in dread, now that is again ugly winter, of a recurrence of that infection that laid me low two winters ago. But these are gloomy matters

and I would send, end with
love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
[December ? 1948]

My dear Charles,—

Your lovely book came last evening, and I am very grateful for it.

I have done no more than glance at it. I had looked with some care at the TRINACRIA. Did not the infidel companions of Odysseus eat the oxen of Hyperion there? I was perplexed somewhat. I hear you say, Return, clodpate misreader, camel, beadle, egg without yolk. So I shall and very soon.

You have been deeply in mind. The other day I saw Professor Cargill on the street and again he asked me to be sure that you called him when you arrive. Joseph Freeman, whom I knew years ago, and who has a warm, Mediterranean brain, is eager to meet you. I gave him the (your) book I bought. He is reading CALL ME ISHMAEL the second time. Every one asks after you, Monsieur Caviar, the women ask after the health of your navel and the unambiguous males enquire after your genius, beg for your address, and wish to know just what savings account you have. As a matter of truth, Joseph Freeman thought that a month hence or so we might make a little trip to Washington to see you.

I now have a week's vacation from teaching. Soft, archangelical words come from Winifred, but her acts are mortal foes to her low, sighing words. Nothing has been achieved. I am always poor because of her, and that is why I have not sent you money. I do not mean the small ten dollar debt to you, naturally it is little to me, since I owe it, and nothing to you as you have not got it. I am still sorely prone; she has powdered the very quiddity of my soul with her heel. She has the legal sickness; I would rather have the botch or the Neapolitan boneache.

Yes, I have met a number of women, one an icelandic dame, daughter of the prime-minister of Iceland who asked me to go there. O what a boreal place in which to sport. There is a Scotch woman, but she is married to a bad artist; he is a mongrel, Irish, Spanish, French, with a little poodle Balkan to it. A very hysterical man who promises to hang himself every time she threatens to leave him. Up till now I have always coveted the portion of the painter. He can hang his canvases; a writer can simply hang himself. I do not care for any more

laceration than I have, and then I think my pulses are waning; soon as a woman is wary, my blood congeals. There is a Hungarian dame, very earnest and meek when she is alone with you; she strokes your thigh with the greatest integrity, but at a party she is spiceless, and I feel as knit to her as I would to a Eunuch at the court of Jezebel.

You will always require money, my dear friend, and so there will be time, a season for the peaches, and the deep pocket-reaches, ay, what a preachy couplet, were I ambitious enough I could get a Nobel award for such knavery.

Please pardon me if I fail you now; I am your friend in ACT, and when I prove it, as man must always prove his friendship, lest it spoil because it is not savored or eaten, and therefore was never ripe, then I can loosen my tongue.

I hear little of Constance, you send me her greeting, but it is such dry chaff it could burn without sun or fire.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Mrs. Sherwood Anderson may telephone you & Constance on her way back from the south. She is a fine woman, & both of you will enjoy her.

[Washington D.C.]
January 15, xlix

My dear Edward:

Forgive me that I have delayed to write these abundant thanks for the grace and force of your letter to me about *y & x.*

But alas, it put me into my own despair. I have not been able to rise even tho the wings of your words let rise my spirit. For I am barren, and do not sing.

Instead, I shall include some days' work. You will understand.

There is a quarrel in me, and I am unhinged. You must excuse

me if I have nothing to say. I do not know which part of speech to speak from, what organ. Some certain things have left me. Others are not yet born. I gnaw, and gnaw.

I have news for you, familiar news. Number 1 of 3 has said no on the FLEA. It was the most commercial. Suffering present, but not enough substance to make a book! Bah. I am sending off now to 2: burn aloes and violets, if any grow by you, but keep the rue.

My thanks, dear Friend, my thanks. I am merely slain by my own perplexities.

my love,
CHARLES

Tanto e Amara

I have heard the dread song

I had not heard, in the middle of life, I had not heard
I was all eyes, all things were, now they are blind
and I am, I crawl, do not know where I go

You who have heard the song will understand.
Death is a remote beginning.
I am rudimentary.
I grow a heart.

I stumbled when I saw, knew high passage, persons
one imperial nature whose conclusion was
nothing, it is nothing
I know now it was nothing.

The wise man said, nothing dieth but changing as they do
one for another show sundry formes.
He lieth. I cannot have back my mother.

In the grave, before the dirt goes, will go my love

What shall I be, what forms will plague me then
where shall I go, in what ditch pour what blood to hear
her voice, the love I hear, that voice now mingled in

the song,
the song of the Worms?

CHARLES OLSON

[New York City]
January 18, 1949

My dear Charles:

Sent you a special, and then enclosed a note in another letter to be forwarded to Wellfleet. Would you please let me know by return mail the name of the school in which harry moore teaches and in what town it is located. Please!

My love to you
EDWARD

[New York City]
January 18, 1949

My dear Charles:

It is a deep pain to wound you. I send you my words out of the fat darkness of obscurity. Should there be truth in them, what good, alas, is it for you whom it prongs. Or what satisfaction can I have as a darkling, stumbling Tiresias whose penurious foreknowledge maims his friend. It requires years in Erebus to labor for a few poems, and one epistle to deny them! Did I not pay homage to your identity, knowing there are ideal images shadowed there more astounding than those in Plato's Cave, I would reckon myself an Iago to your Muse. Do not believe that I do not honor the imaginative strength of your line, or that I slyly hanker after the lucre clodpates of letters.

My own distraction has been so bizarre that I never asked you whether you received The Rational Tree. Horace Gregory read the

two and his deepest yea is for the Rational Tree. He showed me some of his unpublished verse, one, My Lady Circe. He has our feeling for Homer and for the tripod. But how simple it was for me to locate his flaws, while yours so baffled me. They were as hard for me to fathom as sin, and as difficult to relinquish. I had to be two persons, a loving friend as well as the Conscience, the servant, and if necessary, the Erynes, of a Genius. Ay, speaking so, fate has been baying at my heels.

Nobody knows how to make a book; even after it has been written, and one or two or three human beings say yea to it, can the owner of the vision be sure he is not a lazar, a pickpocket, a lewd churl. How often can one read the most amazing line one has made without draining gall and hyssop? How long was Shakespeare able to stomach HAMLET? It was a spewing forth to begin with. Once Callimachus said, A great book is a great evil.

Yes, we know nothing, but such infamous divination is not the result of a Socratic syllogism. We go to the oracles slyly, but Apollo often gives hindmost replies or none at all, and in the meanwhile we are more plagued than the cattle who have murrain. No beast suffers so much as man. Man is miserable because he wants to be an animal or because he does not want to be one. The poet wishes to be a gifted beast!

Winifred disappeared from Massachusetts with my two sons. Would it be craven to say that were our calamities weighed in Job's Balances, mine would be the greater? I have had eleven more years than you in which to make a cairn of woes upon which no man pours oil or worships. What have I compassed that you have not? I have no verse printed or tombed in a drawer that remotely equals yours. Do I churlishly believe that SING O BARREN is as good or better than CALL ME ISHMAEL? I do not believe anything. The irrational god of my own powers and ruin does not let me so think. The only proposition I would earnestly ask you to ponder, or to dismiss, is this: the difference between CALL ME ISHMAEL and Y & X is the ultimate

distinction betweeen Edward Dahlberg and Ezra Pound. Now when I have said this, I am simply telling you what you are acting upon yourself. Your mountain springs and the Naiads of Helicon are in Statius, Chrysostom, Horace, Homer, Plutarch, O merciless gods from whom we beg a basket of summer fruits and a BOOK, which when they give us we deny, — O such mocking deities, we have to fail or die! And earth is the root of all literature, for Proserpine, the consort of Pluto, is the Seed of those April, zephyry words that gull and cheat us, and for which we so pine.

Maybe, you could send a copy to Professor Oscar Cargill at New York University, Washington Square College; he is doing his second volume on American Literature and will be writing about you, and one to Horace Gregory, at Palisades, New York, Rockland County. I am thinking of some attention for the pomes. Would you send a review copy to Alexander Cappon, perhaps with your compliments and my regards. The University Review gets a good deal of attention. The address is Professor Alexander Cappon, Chairman of the English Department, University of Kansas City, Rockhill Road and 50th Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

Let me please, here from you soon. I have a hundred examination books to grade, but I had to stop to write to you.

My devout belief and loving friendship.
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]

My dear Charles:

Your POEMS kindle the greatest perplexities. I do not want to fathom speciously what you so plainly know. There are lines wondrously wrought, but I do not have enough of the darkling speaking heart in these five poems. Five small verses divulge the occult skill but

not the minerals in the man. O I know we have less than five hundred lines of Heraclitus and Empedocles! It is not, perhaps, that you write too little, but that you do not walk forth upon the page as Empedocles or Charles Olson. I am a kindred of your vision, but the greater moiety of it you withhold for some riper seeding. Proserpine descends into the dark earth to reappear in budding Spring. I wait for the leafage and the parsley, and even for the choughs and the horned owls and the seagulls in the Cave of the Nymphs.

I do not comprehend all of your lines, and here I may be whipping myself. The riddle of a line should lie in its truth. Vision is the suffering pang of the bowels, but you have dismembered your sorrow and cast its Osirean body into the Nile. The pith of my meaning is in your beautiful, Learean chant, "Of bitter work, and of folly cockatrice and cockololly furiously sing." Here I am the vassal of your imagination. The opening, though much less piercing, I pay homage to, because, I am such a fool as you, and dare you to be more the FOOL, "Go, fool, and hatch of the air a blue egg."

Your allusion to Trinacria I cannot understand; the definition is lucid, the text without ambiguity, but why should such a thought be in your imperial nature: "Who fights behind a shield Is separate, weak of the world Is whirled by sons of self, sown As teeth, a full armed crop Sprung from no dream No givers of a fleece Who bring their dragon blood inside Reality, half slain" Is not the world the baneful chalice? Who would drink more of such Medean ingredients? We sow dragon's teeth in the Cadmean fallows, and the armed men that crop up against us is the World from which we separate ourselves. The lines, penned in gore, not the ewe's, the goat's, the ram's, but the heart's, are too sententiously dried out.

If I have misread you, do not believe that some arrant knave who praises you will do better. The men who bring us laurels and chaplets are our Erynes.

There is only one jot of dross in all the verses. You will find no healing seaweed or salts in a Buchenwald. You are too abstruse to re-

quire *more* experience. Vent your Angers, and the Muses will give you fillets and sweet calamus.

Please do not be vexed with me. No man is a more steadfast Horatio to your Genius than I am, but I look for the crowing of the dawn in your nature, for the Morning Star, Lucifer, and for Isaiah's cockatrice that creepeth in every man's skin to make its hiss, and I want to see the piteous Ghost that wails so secretly, and on the nightside of our selves, drop its filmy garment upon the head, and then disappear as one man vanishes from another after he has emitted the nether deposits of his identity.

At the moment, I am a nullity, and hear nothing but the song of the Worms.

Do not think that I do not consider these poems of death Worth, or that I go hankering after some churl of letters for better ones. They are the best, but they are not good enough for me from Charles Olson.

Your loving friend who deeply thanks you for sending the POEMS and for the tender words you wrote.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
January 19, 1949

My dear Charles:

I wrote you a special delivery letter this morning, and pray you will have it by this evening. Would be grateful to you if you would send this right out to Miss Freeman at Wellfleet. And will you, please, send back any letter I may get from her, special delivery.

My love,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Wednesday [January, 1949]

My dear Edward:

All three of your letters came, and the letter to la dame sans merci was off and away from here at noon.

the worm moore crawls on ground I used to know well as a child—Wellesley Hills, Mass., where my father's sister lived (I learned to my horror a short while ago that she was struck down by an automobile in her age and her life was so taken from her)

moore is a small part of another knave's place, the Babson Institute (which also was a part of my life, for Roger Babson comes from Gloucester, and I was raised and attended by his sons who are physicians — Babson you will know as that gimcrack of business

I have just talked to La Crosby to try to get out of her the three copies you recommend be sent. I feared it would, at this moment, be difficult, for she just mailed 50 press copies, and as she has sold only 30, and is in debt for some 1200 dollars for the edition, she is copy-shy. But she allowed as how she would send one off to Horace Gregory at least. (Do keep me posted if he doesn't receive it fairly soon.) I am somewhat disadvantaged pressing her because some two years ago she paid me $100 for the verse and then, last summer, when Constanza was ill, advanced me another $50 against sales. (Which is, as you well know, high behavior for publishers for such low attractions as ourselves!) But in a short time I shall be able to acquire two more copies and shall see that Cargill and Capon receive them. It may be only that they will not have them until after Feb 1st. How much further I can go with Mme will depend on what sort of notices, if any, the slim-thing receives.

You have all my heart's responses for your troubles, from 100 blue books out! If only Black Mt were in NY you'd have unshouldered that weight at least!

This note is a thin thing for such an ample letter as you gave me, but I am writing it to catch the afternoon collection and deliver the

corpse of moore into your hands.

Do write me as many times again. It is a deep pleasure.

Your friend
CHARLES

[Washington D.C.]
Thursday afternoon [January, 1949]

Edward:

A note, as I take the mss to the p.o. to send registered: it should be in Straus' hands in the morning. Very much regret I was not home to talk to you: you have a register and tone now to tell of the Dostoevsky furnace you are being burned in.

I wired and wrote Albers. All you said of it was true. I need it, and have left myself in a money state I don't know the way out of. But interior things fix me here. I shall have to find work, some appointment in this swamp where I find ground.

I also sent off the letter. And the book to you will go to Church Street, unbeliever.

Your friend,
CHARLES

Payne is out: has had all his books refused, his time in the U.S. is up, and, with his tail in his hand, he must go off to Persia, Tibet, and Delhi, poor man.

[Washington D.C.]
Wednesday Feb 2 [1949]

My dear Edward:

Are you allright? I have the feeling you are so involved in transac-

tions in the Wellfleet-Plymouth-Provincetown triangle that you have no time except for that pool and billiard game of women you must play.

I have mapped out your present life in spite of your silence: it is clear you must be teaching at NYUWashSq, live in that fallen ymca the B-C, when you are not bedding yourself down in some of that Scotch-Rumanian-Irish hay you made my mouth water with, Silenus. But when do you read and write?

I reread THE FLEA before I shipped it off again, and I am the more convinced about it. Did you do any more with your own idea, to expand it as a narrative? Or to do another in a like form? ((In answer to your query, THE TREE did come, and I have it, still stubbornly seeking to have the FLEA published for itself. I hope you won't mind my critical stool, from which, as you once said, one always falls into the dungheap.

I read, go out, and do not do enough work — But why should I sting myself with lead? I am in a period of reading and question, and am desperate. Nothing as shape pulls me on. But today there are shadows of a shape, and I feel better.

Tonight I go to see for the first time Mr and Miss Graham dance. For Mr (then Erick Hawkins) I did that play with the obscene title. But Mrs (then Miss Hush) I have not seen dance. I doubt I shall be able to dispel Fannie Brice as Martha Graham in a Follies years ago.

Two things come to my mind to ask you: you never did give me an inscribed copy of BONES (I know I have a SING, but BONES, sir). Nor have I any longer my copy which I gave away to Robert Payne when he left for Tibet. I have no way of knowing whether you have any copies, and I do not want you at this straitened time to buy one. But keep it in your mind that I have asked for one. —And one time when you have another copy present it to BLACK MT: I keep sending the men and women there (Yala, Bodky on around) to your text. And there is none.

This was a note to include bills, receipts, and like dregs, which I'd

have no man receive like cold meat.

And your word?
Love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
February 3, 1949

Dear Charles:

I found Winifred and Geoffrey and Joel and Sharon in a town just outside of New York City. It took the wiliness of Odysseus to locate them. Sharon cannot endure Moore. I go up each week-end to see them. Geoffrey is extremely tender and very crestfallen when I leave.

I have been in Erebus. Have been reading some Statius and Plato. Did you see to it that the POEMS were sent to Horace Gregory.

I have been sorely troubled about the money owing to Sam Rosenberg, but what with taxes and mortgage payments and money required to take care of the children I have so far been unable to repay him. He will be paid, and with my heart thanks.

I am really prone; please forgive this epistle as sluggish in spirit as the waters of Styx.

My love to you, and do write me.
EDWARD DAHLBERG

It is a mistake not to send Oscar Cargill a book; he will be writing about you. Unless you crave fatter oblivion than is mine, you must guide your publishers. Moore said that Caresse Crosby hated me. She came to see me years ago, wishing to print proletarian literature. I at once advised her that that was an oxymoron, and saved her money and shame. I am as despised as Jeremiah, a derision on the tongues of churls. If a man is without arms or legs he breaks me with his tongue.

Charles, please get this letter to the tax collector into the mail right away. I would consider it a great kindness if you would forward any mail to me with despatch. I must prevent the usurers from getting the property.

[New York City]
February 7, 1949

My dear Charles:

I spend my week-ends with Winifred and the children. She is still deeply drawn to me, but I do not know what we will do. When a woman becomes rational I go mad, and like Christopher Smart, am ready for Bedlam.

Winifred had a long conversation with Edmund Wilson in Wellfleet not long ago. The quiddity of the conversation is something like this:

Wilson: I have the greatest respect for Edward's gifts; but if I read his book and don't care for it, he will become very angry with me.

Winifred: I don't think you should read it. I would not put it into the hands of anybody who did not beforehand have a quick sympathy for it. Besides, you don't have the culture to read it.

Wilson: I am very fond of Edward. Why don't you let me send it to England. A contest is being held and Edward might win $5000.

Winifred: I am not a literary critic, and my name never appeared in the New Yorker. But Edward has read the Masters to me so that I can tell the difference between merde and poetry. You have read so much contemporary filth that you no longer know how to read.

Wilson: I have real affection for Edward. Why don't you let me send it to Herbert Read so that he could enter his MS in the contest and win $5,000.

Winifred: I admit I have a copy of Edward's MS, but I know he would prefer posthumous publication to a contest.

Wilson: If a woman believed in me as you do in Edward, maybe even I could write something momentous. I know Edward is remarkable, but I don't want him to turn on me as he had done to others. I think

he ought to send his book to the contest and win $5,000.

Winifred: Edward would never win a prize because the judges can't read or write. You never cared for his other book.

Wilson: Edward is a wonderful person, but I don't think I ought to read his book. But why don't you let me mail his MS. to the jurors in England. Sometimes people are so gifted that they totally misunderstand a book and award it 5,000.

I am still reading and teaching at Brooklyn Polytechnic College. As soon as there is quiet in my belly and frankincense in my mouth I will begin to fumble for words. I have a copy of Do These Bones Live in Wellfleet, and as soon as I can get one from there it will be my pleasure to send you one. I must order copies of the English edition. But I owe them money. Still, I should like to own a few copies and send you one. I will do so.

I think of your POEMS, and anyone who gainsays your GIFT is a churl. Did you mail a copy to Horace Gregory? I looked over CALL ME ISHMAEL, and it always pulses and surges against my trembling veins like the evening surf being easily raked in by Poseidon's Trident. I love the little book, and it awakens in me all our deep, lost origins, cairns of racial composts.

Do as you like with the Flea or the Rational Tree. I dont mind at all your critical feeling about the TREE. Not at all. I am in too much turmoil at the instant to be reflective.

Harry Moore has edited letters of Lawrence to Bertrand Russell and Harvey Breit has blessed them. Give me a doomsday curse, a Tartarian malediction: when benedictions are so rife.

I am weary, but wan as I am your words made me smile and I wanted to show you some in return, as pithless as they are at the moment.

My love to you,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
March 17, 1949

Dear Charles:

Your letter was manna and quail in my wilderness. I have had your sibyl, Jane Harrison's PROLEGOMENA, and also the SHAKESPEARE IDENTIFIED. A rereading proves nothing; that he was no malt Balaam I knew before; that he made no money my own patrimony devoured by property taxes and Winifred, now divorced, is the best text. I will reread the Xenophon, and you may find repeated joy in Plato's PHAEDO. The Hesiod Theogony is a source for your MYTH; I make no claims for it as poetry, although the simplest record of fable is an homage to the MUSES. I am still pondering the character of Socrates, and wondering about that double-tongued and negative Zeno and his purificatory cross-examinations of eminent fools. How to write is still a great perplexity. I am inclined more and more to find a piercingly simple prose; let the legend of my heart be the oracle. Then there is that vile Gorgonian knot which I cannot untie, how to get lucre. My teaching ends in the latter part of May with no assurance of summer work. It had been my deepest hope to begin on the book then. I am told by other members of the faculty that the chairman holds me in high regard. But how shall I translate such coin, academic esteem? I am not at this instant averse to going into the provinces. Aside from continual reading, and living out my life in a hotel room, I am in the hinterland. I see fewer people; the psychic depletions are great, the guerdon is small. I simply go out on occasion to sharpen my wit very much like the ancient Jews went to Gaza to whet their shares. Incidentally, the communists in Croton offered Winifred free legal service to pursue me!

Homer is still a deity; the other day I read a volume on Homer and the influences of Tyre and Sidon on the ILIAD that was very pleasurable. Unfortunately, I learned little that I had not known previously. It always delights me to hear again how Menelaus took

hold of Proteus in the Aegyptus stream until he forced from that wily god the oracular secrets he desired to know. Can we ever lay hands on Proteus and force him to reveal what our clandestine life will not divulge? This again brings back the knotty and baffling perplexity of prose or verse. Should the line be an Afric leopard, a water-hog of the Nile, or just a mild Pythagorean bee. Should we write humbly or fiercely or plainly? I know I have been too obscure; what right has man to be as darksome as a god in his lore? Ay, who will tell me anything? Meanwhile, my ruminative cud are bitumen and asphalt, and I walk alone thinking as best I can, but these miserable peripatetic exercises are in only a small way purgative, because there are neither gods in Hades nor mortals here for company.

I hear regularly from Herbert Read; for the most part, our relationship has been aloes and frankincense. But since the publication of his last book other odors have come up. He cited a line from CALL ME ISHMAEL which I had given him to honor and to publish to confute me! I was deeply heartened to know that the book had made an impression upon him. I cannot blame a man for wanting to feed his wife and five children; I sometimes doubt that he should feed the former. If we must live in Grub Street, we have to save our strength for vision somehow. I imagine poor Kit Smart was a literary porter most of his life in order to live and compose THE SONG OF DAVID and the Pascal Lamb poems. Unless we save our forces for the spirit we might as well eat the acorns, the mast and drink the drugged Pramnian wine, and go at once without boast or lies to Circe's Sty. There is no good feigning to be on the Parnassian slopes with swill on your shoes.

Now that I have sent for my books there is a strike. I am sure this is just malice! some demon told these workmen to hinder me more. Regarding the tender papyrus, I have been trying for some time to get Porphyry's CAVE OF THE NYMPHS. I want to know better how to roost with the horned owls and the choughs and the seagulls either in that hollow underneath the earth or in that cavern at Salamis where

Euripides looked out at the beating white surge. What I would not give at this instant to hear the sea-cry of a gull or look at a heron or at that Arion's Dolphin that carries man out of the shoals.

Let me hear from you soon, Charles; I wish we could talk. I am more starved for conversation than crusty, wormy Lazarus was for a morsel from the rich man's table.

What does Constance do? I have had no sense of her since the hospital days when she was guzzling ice cream and being such a gay and foolish canary in the midst of trouble. I am not a canary. I am just gay and foolish.

My devotion and love,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Washington
Friday March 25 xlix

My dear Edward:

Your bounteous letter guerdoned us both, caused us to dance, my friend, naked in this room! So one steals archaic pleasure, in a filthy time.

And tho you have not heard from me I have been at some things which concern you. FIRST, your book is in press — at least Cernovich is experimenting with type and space. I send off to you what came today. I have already written back to him, to lengthen the line and to try a Baskerville instead of this Bodoni. But I like the mass he has accomplished. Do you? You must ignore his errors. It is a trial piece. He overwhelms me when he says the cost will run 100 to 250 dollars. I have told him that is as much as you or I earn for a book, after ten years of Tantalus rocking the sun. I sd 100 is already too much. Question: do you have anyone who will contribute to same?

When I was there they asked to see THE RATIONAL TREE as well. They now have it, and will print both together if they have the

time and number of people sufficient. (Albers, by the way, is delighted they do it. Whatever his faults as rector, he is artist enough to be a trout to a lure. I like him excellently. He leaves, as I told you, in a huff, this June. Bodky, Goldowski, Trayer unseated him when they meant only to unseat Dreier. A's wife is an erinyes.)

And I have written to John Caldwell at Alabama, and you should hear from him, for I said you were he—if he could get you to leave New York. I still question that you should. But there. Each man to his errors. And they are least important in you, because you rectify them so quickly!

But I doubt you think so these days.

All week I have been walking as many paths as days back into Greece. Today I sent off to a young composer Part I of a dance play called TROILUS for him to experiment with. Yesterday it was Euripides, his ORESTES, which I was trying to get to by way of Way, angry that I do not have that language. The day before Odysseus (& Homer: would you please tell me what was the book you spoke of reading, of the influence of Tyre & Sidon on the Iliad?) Do you know any writing by anyone on HOMER, which has illuminations? Even Harrison deserts me here, though this week I found reference to very early book of hers on the myth of the Odyssey in art. If you come by that, get two also, Ed.

Edward, this is a note to haste to you the look of yr words in type. You must excuse this wretched thing in return for your lovely letter. So I, poor, ask another of you!

Love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
April 5, 1949

Dear Charles:

Your queries kindle me deeply. How the myth-producing mind,

the mythopoeic faculty, must labor for FORM is our task. There are a number of books that I have not yet seen. For a year I have endeavored to procure Porphyry's THE CAVE OF THE NYMPHS. The entire problem of the gods without whose solution no ancestral or eponymous literature can be conceived is best summed up in Socrates' remark to Miletus: "You strange men, do you earnestly believe that I do not regard Helios and Silenus as divinities?" A piercing bit of knowledge is that Aristotle in his old age found in mythology his sole consolation. You know how Heraclitus reprehended those that did not accept the Homeric theogony. Now as other readings for you: may I suggest the long, doughty and remarkable essay on SOKRATES in Grote's History of Greece. I believe you will read with profit his chapters on The AEolids and the Pelopids, on Attic Legends, the Arcadian Genealogy, Legends of Thebes and Legend of Troy. His disquisition on the Homeric Poems is perhaps less satisfying. The volume, Did Homer Live, by Victor Berard is agreeable, but you will find that Sidon and Tyre in the ODYSSEY yourself. The best sources are the ancients; there was the adversary of Strabo, Eratosthenes. Soon as I get more of these books I will let you know at once. If I see additional copies I will buy them and send them to you. Our imaginations are kindred; let us be sure that before we do our work they are not rubble Titans.

The page pleased me; as you say, the print is not right. It is glutted with errors, but that you have already told me. I believe one line is missing, but I am not sure. I should like very much to see the two included in the book, that is, The Flea of Sodom and The Rational Tree. And let them go for what they are, while I retire to the bowels of Mount Aetna to work with the Cyclopes in Vulcan's stithy.

The Four Seasons Book Shop on Greenwich keeps CALL ME ISHMAEL in stock just for me. I gave a copy last week to Professor Howard Dunbar of the English department at New York University. I asked the book people whether they were selling the POEMS, but they said the salesman or the jobber told them the book had not yet

been published. Is that true? I see no periodicals and so do not know.

I am distressed to hear that Josef Albers is leaving. I do not think he should. How many people have been put into the maw of Kronos at Black Mountain would be hard to compute. The leafage and the fetid earth is a devil and a place for mania, suicide, and avant-garde pederasty. Still, I am very grateful to the students who are printing the book, and would be deeply pleased if you would give my full thanks to Cernovich. I remember the thewy willow with the glasses and the daedal eyes.

If I can get summer teaching I will be able to send money for the book. Please let Sam Rosenberg know that if I have summer work he will receive the forty-five dollars due him with my deep heart-thanks, and ask him to forgive me. I still owe you ten dollars which I have not forgotten. The property is my bane and Acheron, it yields nothing but the bills of the she-Briareus.

Read this to Constance when you are so mooded; it is from Thomas Campion:

"If I love Amarillis,
She gives me fruit and flowers,
But if we love these Ladies,
We must give golden showers,
Give them gold that sell love,
Give me the Nutbrowne lasse,
Who when we court and kiss,
She cries, forsooth, let go.
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say no."

Winifred may give me a check for fifty dollars toward the Black Mountain publication of the book. If she does, I will have it made out to you, and you take care of the matter when you go down to Black Mountain.

I give you my gratitude, which is like the honeycomb in Pindar's mouth. And I give you my love and with it the fillets and the pears

and the pomegranates to the Pierian Sisters who smile fondly upon your GIFT.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Friday April 8 1949

My dear Edward:

I have had another letter fr Cernovich, one half hour ago, which I have answered. He has gone ahead well. It will be necessary to use bodoni (in *any* font they have so little type they have to set 1 page at a time, and throw the type back before setting another) but he followed my suggestion a longer line, and it looks good. C ran into trouble on binding, but he has solved it by adopting the Chinese design, the book is sewn when it is all done ((*rhapsodia* means to *sew* or stitch *song* together)), with two covers front & back. The problem he is beset with now is paper — which, and how to buy it. If you can get me the check Winifred promises, instead of waiting until I go down (not until the 25th) I would send it off immediately so that C can go ahead. (I have suggested an issue of 100 copies, with a colophon describing the book as a first special edition handset, numbered, & signed by you, done at the Black Mountain Press, design Cernovich, supervision Warren Jennerjahn.

NOW to what causes me to write in haste: (1) which of the two titles do you wish for the whole? Myself, you know, I favor FLEA.

(2) May I have your permission to put my hand into the text in some such fashion as I did into the 1st 3 pages of FLEA? I should keep my intrusions to a minimum. — If you consent, can you send me a second copy of both pieces? They have the blue text, and ought to have it by. If you could let me have another, I could keep filing pages to them as I finish.

Do let me hear from you on these matters just as soon as you can. C is beginning to get a little frightened at the thot of 75 pages, each set & scrapped before the other can be done, and with only two months-left of his year there (he cannot afford another, the shame of it; he worked a year and a half to get himself there a year; he is worth the whole she-bang; I have got him, however, into a long story about his mother and brother: his blood is thick as were the Atreides, those Phrygians; have you any ideas (o we comrade ragpickers) where he might manage a life?) I sent him your message to cheer him up, the daedal.

Otherwise only Ovid is new (came on his Medea in the Heroides). And Berard, whom I have fed on. The English bk you, too, came to, is miserable, but the base text Les Phynicein et L'Oddyssee is fine & thick, and I am now trying to get his translation of the Odyssey in 3 volumes. The gain is the precision of nouns he can manage due to his documentation. (I am a gainer, because I was a loser two years ago, when I did the story of O and Nausicaa, and could not get through the bad English heretofore. Had to give it up, the story HE SLEPT. My interest now is a dance play.)

We had Sunday evening with 'Orace Gregory & marya, here. I like OG very very much. I suppose she is the stronger but his weakness has more fruits. I could have fought with her but chose to be amused: she horns the pitch-pipe of p-o-e-t-r-y every quarter hour like the grammar school creatures. (There was only one, a Miss Lee, 2nd grade, who was a woman, we called her Melon she had such breasts.) Horace has a fine feeling for you, and it was a pleasure you sent us.

(As you sow the olson seeds, my johnny-a, I should tell you that the distributor of *y & x* is now THE ATLANTIS BOOKSHOP, 100 Fourth Avenue. It has had but one review, the Nation, and that a matter of SIX words!)

And my deepest thanks for the Socrates, Aristotle, Heraclitus triad. AND FOR THE CAMPION: it is strange how you and I have

got to the same wafty bridge, the Elizabethan singers & the Ancients. At Black MT I took away a book called MELODY & LYRIC by JM Gibbon which you might care to look at (do not buy) for the lyrics there printed I do not find elsewhere. Another Campion, to music by Morley, is:

Now is the month of Maying
When merry lads are playing,
Each with his bonny lass
Upon the greeny grass.

The spring clad all in gladness
Both laugh at winter's sadness,
And to the bagpipies sound
The nymphs tread out their ground.

Fie then! Why sit we musing,
Youth's sweet delight refusing?
Say, dainty nymphs and speak,
Shall we play barley-break?

(I let Constanza come on the other lines by herself. Shall we say she was perplexed? "Shall we play barley-break?")

I was delighted when Gregory said he thought you were as spirited now. Yr delightful letters confirm it. They are my joy. Continue, friend.

My love,
CHARLES OLSON

[small note paper in script]

Dearest Charles — Please send the Homage back right away. Must mail it to London at once. Where's a reply to my letter. Autolycus?

My love to you & Constanza —
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[on reverse side]

Saturday

Edward:

Your sumptuous words! Elizabeth!
"sea-boke" (beautiful), grammar-Castrato,
[ ] Comma book-Barabbases!
Thank you, Edward — I hasten it back — for England, a proper issuance! And say: don't you owe me word of what happened [in] Middletown?

I AM YOUR OLSON

Washington
Monday Morning [April, 1949]

Edward:

We are just in fr Black Mt, and I wanted you to know your letter to Winifred (sent fr NY Saturday) was posted off from the P.O. I hope, for your sake, that that was the only letter you sent for mailing last week. I discovered this morning that the forwarding order I left a week ago got so fouled in the stupidities of the P.O. that all our mail but this one letter from you has been sent to Santa Cruz, California!

You must forgive me I did not write for a week, the more so I had a beautiful letter from you just before we left. But I threw my energies forward into that place, and neglected all else, in order to pierce it to the root.

That done, what shall I say? It is a lovely girl with whom I am in love. You were right. In some karmic fashion, the place is very right on this prick of my time. Albers has asked me to return in

the middle of November and again in the middle of December, and I shall—for three days each time. But I am seriously considering reopening with him the offer of settling there for the winter and spring—if, now that he has had the fountain, he should want to repeat it. I gave him an abundant dance: a class each day, Monday thru Friday. And three public goes in the dining room in the evening.

We are both deeply in your life for the giving of it: it was an illumination when we, unknowing, craved it, and fed like hungry animals. And you are remembered with the proper ambiguity: the best have you hot in them like a discharge from a mortar. It is a measure of Albers size he carries you as fire.

I am most anxious to exchange stories with you. And shall, soon. When, now, I don't know. But I must go off to New England shortly to bed my mother for the winter and shall get in touch with you when I am in N.Y.

Do pardon this rapid note as I am in the door. It is inadequate to our gratification. But hear our love

Your friend's & Constanza's
CHARLES

[New York City]
April 12, 1949

Dear Charles:

I am sending you Winifred's check for fifty dollars toward the publication of THE FLEA OF SODOM. I take the title you prefer. The manuscript shall be in your hands in a day or so, and please do with it as you deem fit.

I am ashamed I have no Greek. I cannot find the words I seek in Homer and which I know are in the original text. On occasion a line is winged speech: The Scamander flows out of the mouth of Zeus. This is legend and poetry. Euripides troubles me very much. I question his

poetic faculty, and though I consider this profane, I could say that he is a thinker rather than a poet. This, too, is spurious; for thought that is not poetry is not pristine perception either. Of some little value for your purposes you might look into Paul Decharme's Euripides. But how can a man be so iconoclastic and such a misogynist and yet dote on the bestial multitude? THE ORIGIN OF BIBLICAL TRADITION by A. T. Clay is better. It is kindling knowledge to be told that Erech and Babel were great Amorite cities at about 4000 B.C. I have always looked upon GENESIS as earthenware inscriptions or pieces of antique pottery with figures of Enoch and Enos upon them. Perhaps the sherd Job scraped his boils with had drawings of those Angels that entered the sons and daughters of men. Legend is more history than scholiasts have been willing to acknowledge. That is why Livy is so wise in being preeminently a fabulist.

Your account of Marya is mirthful and true enough. She has grown a little bulby since the days that she used to complain that she was a better poet than Horace while she swept moles of dust into the corners. One day she showed me her verse. After I read it I asked Marya to get her broom and sweep the dust out of the corners. You know how clairvoyant I am! A year or so later she got a Pulitzer Award for her verse. Her wish to make Horace great is the volition of Ligeia or Morella. While she stuffs Horace she so diminishes everyone present that somebody is inclined to ask Marya for permission to be just a little bit great himself. I will be content with some few pages if the Muses are kind and fortune not too severe. If a man write one lovely line he may go to Elysium. All the great men of our day will feed forever on Lethe's weed.

Did you hear, Charles, about the college position? I am very worried about summer. My checks stop the end of next month.

Cargill will return from California sometime next month and I will show him your card to me. I imagine he will be pleased to make the exchange. What do you want the book for? I know nothing about it.

I want to get this into the mail; do let me hear from you soon; thanks for the charming song you typed out in your letter, also very charming. How is Constance, or I ask with more grace, Does she form her mouth to her liking, and is her hair softly trussed at the back of her neck?

My love and my friendship,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Wednesday [April, 1949]

Edward:

How fine the FLEA looks on yr grey letter paper! I am rushing off a sheet of it to Cernovich, for example.—He wrote me this morning, acknowledging the check (I to you likewise now) but admitting he is scared, only 60 days left, and it takes him 2 days to set a page. I shall put his courage back ("Du courage a l'ouvrage", sd Verlaine) by letter now, and be there myself next week to see what can be done. —He is asking whether he better not limit himself to one of the two parts.

I am sending on to you a sample of the cover he proposes to use (it is scratched, he apologizes: it will be clear and clean!) You will recall it is to be hand-sewn in the Chinese manner. And the weakness of their design is the tendency of the cover to come off at the front-face hinge. I assume that is why he and Si chose plastic. The question is: can you tolerate it?

FOUR SEASONS, thanks to yr sowing, lists ISH in its spring catalogue. I have returned them an order for books for Black Mt. (I like their tone, of 'em all)

But the fruitful books, one cannot find. I go round asking helplessly for the LOEB and the BOHN, but am already beyond them and have such needs that either I cannot afford or find. (Ran into a

book in the former category I wanted to draw to yr attention: called THE WHEEL, a study of the use of praying wheels.) —I continue to feed deeply on Berard. Have now his translation of the Odyssey, which makes it possible for me, for the first time, to have it in such exactitude of language I can read without irritation. He opens, for example, with this characterization: l'homme aux mille tours. And, due to the documentation of the port of Alkinoos, is able to make the Nausicaa passage have the body I suppose it has in the Greek. (Shall we not learn that tongue?)

And I find Berard's argument the Odyssey is three "dramas" most imaginatively useful.

What is yr Socrates piece, you speak of rewriting? Did the Xenophon reveal more of him? And what is the best Chrysostom?

Love,
CHARLES

No word fr that Alabama Caldwell about you & the position. Have you? Does the Cargill rise lead you back to NYU?

[New York City]
April 22, 1949

Dear Charles:

Read Chrysostom's Trojan Discourse in volume 1. According to this version only the *eidolon* of Helen was taken to Ilium, while Helen herself remained in Egypt in the reign of King Proteus. Look, too, at the conversations of Diogenes and Alexander of Macedon. Thucydides, Polybius and Pausanias are glutted with references to Troy town and Homer. Thucydides cites with some feeling the Hymn to Apollo in which the blind bard of Chios entreats the Delian maidens to look with favor upon his harp. I am looking for translations of Hellanikus, Damasters, Pherkydes, and will tell you what I

discover.

I have not received the sample cover you mention. Horace Gregory believes the book should be printed and bound with real taste if it is to receive any attention. Otherwise, he believes it will be totally neglected. I think he wants to write about The Rational Tree. By the oath we make to the infernal damsel Styx, No PLASTIC! Let a plastic cover be used for a codpiece to hide what is lame or gelded. NO PLASTIC!

I have word from Herbert Read that an English publisher is interested. What will happen I am not sure. Anyway, I wish to make full thanks in the Black Mountain edition and in the English one, if there is one, to you, Cernovich, Herbert Read, and Gregory.

The Memorabilia I did not read with too much pleasure; it may be a plainer and blunter portrait of that gifted grammarian of ethics and churl of dialectics, Sokrates, than the Platonic figure. I have not changed my mind about Sokrates, but I do want to make a few alterations regarding the mythopoeic faculty. As pious as Sokrates is said to have been, he did disestablish Eros. Without Eros as a divinity poesy and myths and the whole assortment of incredibilias so urgent as aliment to man cannot remain. There is another crucial dilemma: how far can man go in his inquiries without blowing away the fine particles of dust which make up the ancestral and genealogical cairn from which the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women and the Odyssey are taken. There must be a limit which all the ancient sages accepted. Plato emphatically denounced any one who denied the divinity of Helios or Selene, and Herakleitus regarded those who questioned the mythology of Homer as impious.

I have been taking notes all day, and my back is very sore.

Please pardon this brief letter. Would you ask Josef Albers in my name, for whatever it is worth, not to leave Black Mountain College. We both have regard and affection for him, and I cannot see how the college can continue if he leaves.

I have heard nothing from the man you wrote to about appoint-

ing me as a chairman of a humanities department. Cargill will return next month, and if he is not a wily academician he should do something for me. I look for little from that invertebrood.

My love and devoted friendship,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Very important: Please! Charles, send me by return mail the railway express receipts or checks, or whatever there is, so that I am sure to know how many cartons were shipped. Because of the strike the books are just coming in. Two cartons so far have arrived. And let me know, please, how many cartons were sent, and for how much insured.

[Black Mountain College,
Black Mountain, North Carolina]
Monday [May? 1949]

Ed:

I am stupid. I might, three minutes ago, have given you some erhebung, if, that you are to be read by thirty young characters this month, is such. Even if it is at the cost of $1.50 to yourself. For I cannot find here, nor have the BM people been proficient enough to acquire DO THESE BONES LIVE. For I have just bracketed and assigned together DAHLBERG and HOMER: the ODYSSEY & THE FLEA OF SODOM (in mss), BOTTOM DOGS (which they have), and BONES, which I am asking you to send them, please, if you can, this day, attention Mrs. Nell Rice.

Yr call upsets me. You sounded more racked than you have since fall. And it is a misery I had to add Cernovich's charge. For what it is worth, I advise THE FLEA, admitting that it will be still-born, more than the satisfaction to have 30 copies to distribute and by which to provoke. It is little. But Cernovich has taste (you know his page already), can use a better paper, now understands plastic is an

abomination, and will (with Hockstein's help) wrap it in a simple rich paper. But there. You are shrewder than I, and you will gauge whether Read's bite leads anywhere or not. Cernovich will go ahead unless he hears from you to the contrary in the next two days.

Yr message to Albers was handsomely taken as he is handsome. But there seems no way to mend the break. He leaves, as does Bimbus, & Trude, with him (not to speak of madame aa, whom I have no interest to speak of). The Dreiers have gone, now sit in Florida. Except for the plan of a Texan now there, who wishes to reconstruct a BMC outside Dallas (did you ever think of Texas? would you care for such a possibility?), Albers & Friends are going their separate ways. (Albers plans now to bind the year through three short stays in three small places). He is in good spirits, and painting gayly, though angry and bitter towards the revolutionists, Goldowski, Bodky, Trayer, and Mdm Rice. It is all very stupid, and has so riven the atmosphere none of the students do much any more. (Sd several of same last week: the more the time since Dahlberg taught us opens, the more we remember and value same).

These trips tire me very deeply. It is a great effort for me to go, and, back, to return to my work. But they have enabled me to keep this house, even if again, now, I am threatened with its loss, and I am most grateful to you. But, as you see, and sense, and said, I pay! I am very full of despair at my lack of accomplishment this winter.

Do write, and I shall at least to send you my affection. I have that for you, in your troubles, if little else to offer. Here again,

then, my love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
May 5, 1949

Dear Charles:

Thank you for your compassionate letter; I needed it. I sent a telegram to Cernovich asking him to go ahead with the FLEA. I still long to work on it. I would be grateful if you would let me see page-proofs in advance. So many errors that bring the deepest blush to the brain can be made. Maybe, please, you would look at it with some care. I bought a second-hand copy of the BONES and sent it to Black Mountain, care of Nellie Rice. My gratitude to you for whatever words you may have to say about me. I, too, feel shorn away; too much solitude engenders depravity and the worms of Lazarus. It was pious AEcus who begged Zeus for companions when he was alone on AEgina; heeding his prayer he translated the ants on the island into the Myrmidons. I would not be opposed to going anywhere if I might have some kinship to man. I am sepulchred away in this hotel cranny, reading and reading. Have you spent much time on Pindar? I have returned with very great pleasure to Aristophanes. He is a lovely, dithyrambic, decayed Levantine, witty as a Moor or an Arab. How he can write about millet and cheese-cakes and Minerva's olive and the Thesmophorium. Yes, I would earnestly consider going to a Black Mountain outside of Dallas. There is a student of mine down there now, and I have been thinking of going south on a bus and stopping over in Dallas for a time. I cannot go to Rome, or to Paris, or to blessed Attica. Were I to go to the latter place, I could only say what the Platonic Sokrates said: "What I would not give to converse with Homer, Hesiod, Musaeus." Perhaps, the person who is interested in a college settlement near Dallas could give me the names of some persons I could see there. Do let me know, please.

Geoffrey continues to be a piercing orison in my flesh. He is very tender and seems to require me. I cry out, whenever I muse upon him, or capture his face as I walk on asphalt, My Bowels, My Bowels!

I do not know what Cargill will do. You know the academic man. Could you ever link your hand with his, or call him Brother. The pulse of the heart glimmers away as one attempts to utter the name.

I walk on occasion through the square and pass the fountain of the sluts where the diseased muses sit. One little fantastical waved a dollar bill in the face of an Irishman whom he hated because he knew he was broke.

A little commune of learning would be good. There is positively no place, no jot of earth or verdure for a man of feeling any more.

Do not be dismayed if you have not had as many intuitions in the past year as you have prayed for. My entreaties to heaven are rarely heeded. I write solely to remain sane. Look, what swine there are on Parnassus. If wily Odysseus was not able to avoid the tusk of the boar, how can we shun the "middens and the piggeries?"

I am as melancholy as Heracles and Aristotle, and I ask you to pardon such a darkling distemper.

Do let me hear from you soon. When do you go down to Black Mountain?

Take my hand, weak, "indifferent honest," flawed, cunning, but man-fevered, and with it my loving friendship,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington D.C.]
Tuesday May 31 xlix

Edward!

No deal dallas—yet. He has three houses to sell, and neither his will nor the tarot will cause who'll buy his houses. Besides, there has to be a tie-in, one Bobbie Dreier, if not Albers, there has to be a communitas. Which there may be. I'll keep you informed. I go back next week.

I daresay yr silence is expectation I should write first. Which is

herewith done, if not done as I might have it done. Been sick three days (black mt fever) and am ajumpin today. Am secretive. Am writtitive. How are you, I hope not croton-sick, it being the day after a holiday. Or are you blue (-papered?)

DURA

To come to the look in the sacrificer's eyes

the archaic sought, the harshness
unsought

And the eyes which should burst

do not.

I read very much. Acquired Aristophanes today. But of whom I am suspicious.

O yes. Yr readers. It was most curious. You were the one who went home, of all of the year. And what will please you, BONES more, much more than DOGS, and, for the illuminated, the FLEA more than BONES! These, the new ones, read yr prose in a romp, the late prose. If any one had written of you well I'd have sent it to you.

This is a note, to awake you. And to say I should be seeing you inside of three weeks.

My love,
CHARLES OLSON

[New York City]
July 11, 1949

Dear Charles:

I hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of the cattle of Amalek in this appetite for Babel-America? Do you really believe you

are going to deceive a great number of people. My poor friend, be at peace, you will not dupe anybody save yourself and three other readers. I appreciate your zest for all the arts and crafts and races; it is an exhilaration to watch you go out so valiantly to combat your identity and to return each night triumphantly alone! I would give you the chair of American Literature, but you would eat it like the companions of AEneas devoured their trenchers. You should have then the chair of the dance, the drama, a portable bernard de voto, mark twain, the dreiser letters; I would give them all to you would you not grind them to powder as Moses did with the golden calf, making the bitter waters for you. What are we to do? I am aging as you so gallantly advise, and you with the vigor of Rahab, the Dragon and the Leviathan, are hungering for fame. Shall we break the head of the dragon in the waters? What shall we do? In the past eleven years I have grown more obscure? How shall you grow otherwise? Social adhesiveness is so sweet and the palate is so unsatisfied. I who walk around the rim of the earth like Lucifer should have some counsel for you. But I have not. I know you think I have a despot's will and that I would influence you more than you wish. Our problem is kindred, but not wholly the same, I would be content to deceive one person, Charles Olson so that he could write a book more wondrous than that piece of sorcerer's prose, CALL ME ISHMAEL. Charles Olson wants to gull many people by writing a book for the multitude. O I don't mean you are seeking a hundred thousand readers; you would be content to slay ten thousand Philistines like David or if forced to, one thousand like Saul. I should be satisfied with a hundred to two hundred foreskins of the Gentles, one Hebrew, a Greek who does folk dancing and reads Homer and does watercolors over the week-ends, and perhaps a Phoenician and an Ethiopian. But not a Negro American style. Unlike yourself, I believe the Negro with the residual sorrow of slavery in his eyes is a more merciful creature than the free Negro of the north. Go to Harlem and tremble; or go not into those regions of Sheol with the stone tables of Moses and hope to return with your

suit, watch or car. I have another perplexity; how do you manage to prevail upon the bowels of so many Abrahams Isaacs and Jacobs who own asses, oxen and sporting cars? You are more wily than Laban the Syrian. O yes I know, you are a furtive celt; with me you are double and treble, secretly reprehending my monotheism while you run after many american idols. But I know as much as I want you to have the nard and the calamus that Seth brings back from Eden to mitigate the pains of his father Adam, you will not have it by going into the camp of the enemies, the Midianites of American Literature. Fate is so sly that, perhaps, if you are very earnest you might write a bad book and get fame. Otherwise, you are doomed to be as obscure as Spenser.

Charles, I thank you deeply for giving the money to Rosenberg; he is only a Jew by name, for the children of Ham and the sons of Gideon and Joshua are lost and their heritage is base.

I wrote a special delivery to Wilbert Snow; please tell me by return mail whether you have written to President Butterfield. I must support Geoffrey and Joel, and write and tremble like grass. I will labor ardently for publication for you in England. Would to heaven you could heed me; write the long, flowing Melville line, as form it is worth the three kids, the loaves and the flagons of the wine the three prophets took up to Bethel. But the great Melville as wisdom is the inedible fish of Homer and the wights of the sea the Galilean menders of nets caught. I repeat this banality; what else can a man do in his poor, wizened life, but reiterate three or four truths he has learned from someone else. We are always writing another book because the preceding one is a failure.

So much for ageing, repetitious and platitudiarian Edward Dahlberg, but I know my hapless limits, and so I wait mourning on the ground and praying for the noise in the Mulberry trees and the Truths I shall soon receive from the young, vascular Giant of Anak, Mein Herr of the flute, the psaltery, the timbrel, moloch.

Always your friend who gives you love and friendship; as for the

rest of humanity, I cry to the hills, the rivers and to my spleen for remedy.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[in script]
Please send me by return mail the Flea of Sodom & The Rational Tree: I want to work again on the Socratic passages.

[half-sheet of paper]

[New York City]
July 15, 1949

Dear Charles:

I am, of course, happy to hear that you are coming to New York. I am teaching two evenings a week at Brooklyn Polytechnic college and am at present living at the Paris Hotel which is at West End Avenue and 97th Street. The phone number is Riverside 9-3500. If I am not in, please leave a message and tell me where I can reach you. Am writing every morning, doing for want of better phrasing a Cape Cod novel with many allusions to the Book of Enoch and other apocryphal legends the mention of which should make you smart and pine like the Jews ached for the melons, the leeks and the canteloupes of the Nile.

Forgive my silence. It has been singularly difficult for me of late to write a letter, even to you who are my kin and above all my friend.

Let me hear from you, or much better, see you soon.

Your loving friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina]
monday july 18 [1949]

edward

you must excuse me i am having trouble even sleeping & eating amongst these barbarous & vicious creatures who now run this college, who drove albers out, who were pleased you left, and who are now after me whether i shall stay is now my question, tho i am somewhat trapped, & may have to hold

i have found that nick seems to have taken the mss of the r.t. with him (i have the flea) so i am writing now to have the 2nd copies in washington sent to you immediately

i sent the wire winifred requested as soon as her wire reached me it was left in the post office box (the carelessnesses here are beyond toleration) i am delighted for you both, & hope it insures you both economically for next year as well does it?

do write me, and do not be upset if, until i can get something worked out here, i am irregular i feel like a egg shell & a fool

love
CHARLES

a stupidty is enclosed [no enclosure]

220 Sullivan Street,
Apt. 3C,
New York, N.Y.
August 3, 1949

Dear Charles:

I am deeply sorry to hear that your summer at Black Mountain is not giving you quiet. All that you can do to eschew human filths is to cleanse your soul each morning by writing a savory line or reading

one. I saw Herbert Read before he returned to London and spoke to him most urgently about having Routledge publish CALL ME ISHMAEL in London. He agrees with me that this is the most memorable book done on Melville, and he is going to see what he can do [to] get them to bring the book out in London. I shall in the meantime write him again to hasten him to commit this justice. If a good book is given light then a little evil will depart from the earth. Now as for the poems, I have not sent them out yet, but will do so shortly. I do not think Cappon is in Kansas City at this time, and I want him to get the poems. They are gifted, as I know you are, for my Muse long ago advised me so; but I am still praying that you will return to some of the traditional forms in writing. I do not feign that I know how to write or even how to counsel you. I write, and then my writing advises me. And even then quite obscurely. I labor each day for my form in this novel, and at the moment am at work on a fragment I have called the Vision of Uriel. I look for my own guidance to the four archangels in the Apocrypha.

If the London publishers can sell American sheets they will do the Flea of Sodom and the Rational Tree, which shall then appear as you suggest as The Flea of Sodom. I think it inadvisable, Charles, since you shan't be at Black Mountain to have the book done. I don't believe it would be clean or mirthful without you. Unless you need the money, would you remit (what a leopard-like word, remit) the balance of the fifty dollars. I can urgently employ this little lucre. But let me know, please.

As I previously said, I shall make acknowledgments to you and Read for your human goodness in helping me find publication; that will be my timbrel with which I shall go up to the holy mountains if the book is printed in London. Unless I err grossly, I believe it will be done. I have here as bait for them some 30,000 words of this novel; little do they know that this book, too, will be, I pray, good for their spirit, but of no worth whatsoever to their cormorant gullet. I set out in my abominable misery to write a book for the vile world, but

neither Michael nor Gabriel nor Uriel who is set over Tartarus and the world would permit it.

Winifred is very dual, tender but guileful, and she walks in the world with perjured feet as all women do. I adore the children as you know, and Geoffrey in particular is the Son of my entrails, and the son of my Vows. I should like to see you have a son without, of course, the hindrances that I know.

Be sure, my dearest friend, that I labor in your behalf, and that I shall not be content until I find an English publisher for this book and for any other book that you will write. Give up, I beg you, these experimental satans who have put the nails in the Word. Return to Ishmael and to your own Eden.

My love to you, and do let me hear from you soon.

I have found an apartment, very pleasant too, a good size room with kitchenette and bath, a block from Washington Square, and now that food is as high [as] pigeon's dung in the famine of Samaria, I have a pot and a stove for a little cooking.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina
aug 16 xlix

Edward:

Yr check sld come back to you in a few days. I hid it in Washington, the house was empty until the 15th, now the people are back, & they shall forward it. I have written to them.

One clear day of Odysseus the Sun—otherwise jungle & humid. No wonder the creatures are small here, bugs, snakes, turtles. That Albers shld have stayed 17 yrs raises questions abt him.

But I have worked on The Kingfishers, Poetry London will publish the first two parts of it, and some poems, translated into

Italian, will come out in Italy this winter with drawings by Mirko. (Such unions I no longer like, at least in america; but there, like prefaces, they go.)

And I make a production in ten days: of three different projections of THE CYCLOPS, and of a poem NOT THE FALL OF A SPARROW. You must suspend yr suspicion of drahmah. You yourself use the word "novel" when you know better; I go blind, too. Besides, to your despair, dear friend, I am an actor. (Dare I remind you that Homer & Shakespeare were, o my serious one?) ((Another proposition: those who do not know what they are, interest themselves in other people))

I am delighted FLEA will come out in England. This is a wonderful thing, and others should have it. Keep telling me news of it, who and when.

Tell me, mine orakle, which do you choose of these two readings:

> o that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
> thaw and resolve itself into a dew
>
> o that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> thaw and resolve itself into a dew

You see what a moist weather does to my mind. I [ ] how are your sons, & winifred: give them our love. And what you are up to. Send me yr round speech, which hides in my ear like a berry

I must go now to one of these desperrate meals. How come such a man as you did not warn us of this food? They are tantalian.

Love,
OLSON

[New York City]
August 20, 1949

Dear Charles:

Thanks very much for your good, few lines, and I hasten to answer them before laboring for my penury. I am fearfully worried about getting work to support the two sons. I have heard nothing from Middletown; Murdock wrote a long letter, and now Cargill is sending one to President Butterfield whom he knows. Cargill is the new chairman, and that should be a help. It should, but you know how canny the academic mind is, how wily it is; and how it despises the suffering bowels. It is a fearsome thing to have to tell another man that you believe you have some human vision that should be protected, or that Gabriel touched your eyelids by the waters of Chebar at evening. I had to do it, and I felt miry afterwards. Suppose I were as wrong as Waldo Frank! He has become a worse churl and now believes, someone told me, that the only two people who will be recollected in America are Waldo and Erskine Caldwell. This is the indignation of the last times.

What do I know about myself? I know that you possess seven vices that I do not know [I] have, and I know that this is self-deception. I look into those obscure waters of Styx, thy self and myself, and I hurry away, though, alas I return to cringe again.

The poems I am sending this coming week. I wish to reread them very slowly. I wrote to Herbert Read the other day, and, among other things that I said was that two or three books on Herman Melville appear each year, perhaps more, each caitiff author filching some gnome or feeling or pulse of vision from Olson without making a single acknowledgment to him.

Kammerer, a sculptor to whom I gave Ishmael is an admirer of yours. It is better here than in Washington, Charles. Yesterday, I met a young Italian poet and he had a rare piety for literature; Slater Brown who has written badly for years spoke with feeling about the

Wheels in Ezekiel, and after our talk, thief that I am, I wrote a hundred words on Time.

The other evening I read with rapture the Book of Daniel; I continue to read the APOCRYPHA.

I always rejoice, as you know, in your own work of the heart, and it pleases me fervently to hear that more poems of yours are to be published in Italy. Even if I am wrong about your poetry, I shall stand guard over your Muse like Cerberus; for our gift is our pitiless Acheron.

Yea, yea, I know the serpent foliage of Black Mountain and the food the wild asses in the desert would refuse. But I feared for your poverty, and I thought, too, perhaps you are not as troublesome as I am. I felicitate you; you are.

Now I go to the Book of Ezekiel and then to write a just word or two that may be put, I pray heaven and Cocytus, in Job's Balance.

I send you my love,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

You think you have the eagle's heart of Odysseus, but you are a fool; I, alas, know that I am a fool while others regard me as wily. What do I know about myself, Sir Charles, nothing, nothing, save that we are both hapless and wily fools.

220 Sullivan Street
Apartment 3 C
New York, N.Y.
September 20, 1949

Dear Charles:

My deep thanks for the check and for paying Rosenberg; my tardy gratitude is my discomfort about money. At the moment things are worse. I have no appointment, and I do not know what teaching I

shall get. The English publishers have not yet come to a decision, although I thought they had, and those apples I smart for [are] as far [from] me as they were from Tantalus. I wrote a small, apocalyptic essay as a conclusion to THE FLEA OF SODOM, which I have called THE WHEEL OF SHEOL, based in some part on a rapturous reading of Daniel. Otherwise, my solitude is a kind of debauchery; it has all the marks of evil without any of the low satisfactions from it. When I am not inert, I write a little, or read Christopher Smart, Seneca, the Miracle Plays, Porphyry, Livy, Herodian.

I called you this morning and learned that you and Constance were in Gloucester. This is the first time in years I have not had Poseidon's salt on my lips. What I would not give to lie on the sands with some kelpy Naiad, a soft wind from Arabia Felix cooling and spicing my veins.

If THE FLEA OF SODOM is published, Herbert Read is doing a Foreword to it.

You might care for Smart's translation of the Psalms. But considering your sodden silence, your watery inertia in which your Celtic bones are soaked, I beg you to read these lines from the hand of Christopher Smart:

> "In Ireland's wild, uncultivated plains,
> There torpid sloth, and foggy dulnes reigns,
> Full many a fen infests the putrid shore"

You have fallen into the habit of not replying to my letters, and then when I remind you, you say with great guile, are you so Euclidean as not to write me because I have not answered your last epistle?

The Homeric Poems you have written interest me very much. I imagine, when your lines become the chant of the heart, they will not only have the strength of your intellect, which I never fail to understand and fully value, but the misery of your flesh. My own days are the saying of Kadesh for my Mother.

My love and faith,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

washington
october 6 xlix

mydearedward:

yr strictures were more cruel than you know i have been so eaten with my lack of accomplishment (it amounts to four months i have been away from my desk) i got blind to get back there, where, in isolation, only do i work

i have just this morning returned to this desk, and without ease or sense, i insist on writing you this letter, to ask after you, to tell you how fine it is to have had your words, and to seek assurance you are at a less worst than your last letter indicated

yr letter reached me in Maine where my senses, at least, were full of delight what new england was! we were visiting Washington friends in Damariscotta, Newcastle, Wiscasset where it all opens out, East Boothbay, Head of the Tide, those places where the carpenter was the agent of grace

i expect now to be in new york around the 1st of november i had planned to stop off to see you on this return but another emergency on this house has arisen and i came straight through from Boston overnight (my landlady is back from france, and wants to evict us again)

the U of Kansas mag returned the two Sumerian pieces without a howdy-do (included with it was my letter to you, enclosing the verse!) also greeting me was the rejection of the long "Kingfishers" by poetry-london, after i had understood they wanted it

about The Flea: if Read should fail again, would you not want, though I shall not be there, to have me try Black Mt again? I am sure Cernovich would be anxious to do it (though you and I have an enemy who now dominates the place, the bitch Goldowski)

do forgive me i have been so silent, am it is my despair, but i cannot work, or feel spun up, when i am societal is it possible i have now learned to stay where i am and refuse all such en-

ticements (one of the finest pieces of wisdom i acquired from you is, people do not change)

remember me to winifred and to your boys, and let me know that you have teaching and are in less discomfort

my love and admiration
CHARLES

a host of your perceptions have been
alive in me recently

[New York City]
October 6, 1949

My dear Charles:

I do not know how I happened to put your letter in low, alien hands. I ask your pardon, and tell you plainly it was the result of sick distraction, and not done with any purpose. I gave ISHMAEL to a doughty Irishman at Brooklyn Polytechnic College, Professor Donahue, and he liked the sweet little book very much. I do not know how verse or prose should be written, but a Godly line has within it the ram of Abraham, Samuel's anointing horn [?] [to?] a large Nestorian beaker of brine to assuage the melancholy heart. Give me a warm-livered [ ] line; so warm a line that not even the Caucasus can cool or diminish it.

Forgive me, if I have trespassed against your identity. I do not wish to err against your Muse, but to pay homage to it.

You say you are coming to New York. I have an extra iron bedstead, not long enough for King Og, but I offer it eagerly, with pastoral kidney lamb chops, ale, a copy of Christopher Smart's REJOICE IN THE LAMB, which I am saving for you, and a copy of Sing O Barren to replace the one your peripatetic friend took away with him.

Winifred does not let me see the dear, sweet children because I

have not enough money to give to her. My teaching is meager, and I do not know what I shall do. English publication of THE FLEA OF SODOM is still in doubt. But I read poor, hapless Smart, that beautiful Genius in Bedlam, and Herodian, and do you know what loving lines Edmund Spenser wrote?

Some dullard, with fat mushroomed ears who had done a Melville tome has said that pecking pederast Matthiesen discovered the influence of Shakespeare on Melville. I always thought that Charles Olson had. But I am a very foolish man and really believe in the truth, and if you believe what is true you do not have to sow dragon's teeth in the ground to produce armed men all around you.

Your silence makes me uneasy; it wounds me more deeply than my obscurity.

Your devoted and loving friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
November 15, 1949

Dear Charles:

I do not believe that solitude is good for the liver or the blood or the bowels. The gregarious American makes a fetish of his solitude; and I do not think it is necessary to be more alone than man already is either to write or walk or eat. Dying and writing are private acts, but one can neither die or write all the time. There must be seasons, moons and suns for privacy and for friendship. I still believe that the True Poet says, "Will ye go away?" and the Peter of the sodality of trouble and pain and vision will always reply, "Whither shall we go?"

You blame me for not forming Andromache as you would form her. Do you pardon Cressid because she was so moist in bed? or lewd Clytemnestra? Why do you rail at me for the same misogyny you celebrate in Euripides? Was wily Homer a fool about Helen, or even

Penelope. When we want to write about good women, it requires no more than a line or two. Mary Magdalene is painted for us in a sentence or two, and that is right. Unless we are very artful we are far from the truth.

You accuse me of not giving enough of myself to a woman. Well, nobody knows anything about that. You least of all. Of the four women you have known in the past twelve years or so, three of them you met through me, and the other I had known. Some you thought radiant at first, but later relished them less. The one you so defend you rejected and may well have driven into limbo. This was your decision and no one else's, and only a busybody would feign that it were his. Does it matter whether we turn woman aside because her flesh has not the fertility of the Nile, or for another reason. Would you despise a man for rejecting a woman because he was troubled about her nature. Then, my dear, make yourself ready to scorn all the poets in the world.

I know how tempting the ascetic ideal is, and I also know that if a man petitions heaven for denials the gods will give them to him in abundance. Do you wish to be alone; you will be. Do you want to be without friends, as lorn as Prometheus who has no other companions but Earth and AEther. Zeus will not deny your prayer. Do you desire to be a writer, an oracle, a MAN? Then let us argue about friendship, and whether a man who is niggard with his time, will ever have the time to be a friend, a poet, a lover of the infinities and the Milky Way. Art is simply the ritual we make of our lives; make then a ceremonial of your raiment, food, companions, speech, prayers. Who can laugh alone? or eat with Ceres or Bacchus in gloomy solitude? and after a man has made an hexameter or an iambic or a strophe, and after a man has died, who will hear his meters? and who will clasp his ashy and aspen-like hand in desolate Orcus. I make no credo of miserable privation; I accept Necessity, always prayer for the springs and the fruits of the deities.

I do not yet know the issue of this malevolent connection with

Winifred. I must somehow or other father my own sons; this in some way is Godhead for me.

You must believe that I have the deepest feeling for your Muse. The other day I had coffee with Horace; I had brought a copy of ISHMAEL along with me, and said in a testy voice, "Do you not admire this lovely little Melville book, and do you know how many caitiff thieves are pilfering his lines?" Horace has since read ISHMAEL, and spoke with real respect of it. I was very pleased and relieved.

Do not be precious about your time, Charles. There is no way of avoiding folly; I will take instructions from you regarding women, provided you promise me I will not only have a benefit or two from you if I prove to be a meek pupil, but will not receive more injuries from Lais, Thais, Medea, Regan and Goneril than I already have had. In Proverbs it is said that Woman hunts for the precious fluid of life in a man. There are many such opprobrious remarks about ladies, courtesans, wives; in fact, the PSALTER, the Chronicles, the Five Books of Moses, the Greeks and the Latins are glutted with Rahabs and Jezebels, and female Nabals. It is even said that Jael offers milk and honey to Sisera so that she can drive a tent-peg into his brain. I know now that the poets were liars, and that there must be another approach to the woman with rosy teats and the snaky trunks, and I am [ ] in this darkling secret from you, if, of course, you can take yourself away from those visionary cozeners whom you are always reading, and who, perhaps, are deceiving me! O how many books I have misread!

My love and full-time friendship grounded in the olden lore and apothegms in return for a part-time friendship, Occidental style.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

washington
wednesday nov 16 xlix

edward, my high fancy Bastard, stick to cases, don't throw those absolute thunderbolts and think to blind me to the in-work where "Life" (your caps) gets itself worked out

we struck fire over one woman, and the use you had made of her (you, not Euripides, or Homer) i would not presume, as you have, to make judgment on your whole conduct with women (i am too full of particulars about what you have meant to other women than Miss Young) as you well know (and as i carefully said that night we spent the week before) when you write on WOMAN as a creature, when you do a Theophrastus, when you raise up your generalization and sting with it as a tail or tongue, then, what you have found out by your means makes sense, suddenly the sentences form, the "olden lore" you have learned (as you once set out in Kansas City to learn words) gets folded in, and we have a Wheel of Sheol or the "I" of Flea

i was delighted when you recognized yourself as a metaphysician, and talked of resting your life on your principles fine, my Moralist but send your Sermons from your mount to that abstract thing, the World, don't lacerate me with pronouncements about myself when you are not able to include all my particulars

at this precise point we diverge i might trust you the more if, when it comes to particulars, you were as fulsome as your praises (i speak now of my mortality, not Ishmael, dear friend)
are you scrupulous, when, each time it comes up, you moan i did not become Asst Sect of the Treasury?

you see, i do not believe that art is simply the ritual we make of our lives then Christ is an artist

you whore after wisdom good have it i mark how wisdom & commerce

have a way of going together how else could you come to the Americanism "full-time friendship"?

PART-TIME CHARLEY

[New York City]
November 16, 1949

Dear Charles:

You forget that it was you who assailed me. I introduced you to Miss Young to ease you. I did that, having the same judgment of her then that I have now. You know that knowledge and acts are rarely one; if they were, there would be no Zeus or literature or art. I do not see why you should be disgruntled because I say that neither Homer nor Euripides regarded woman as a moral animal. However, they put her in the Balance just as Aristophanes weighs leeks, cheese-cakes, lupins, or as Socrates talks about Justice. One does not pardon bile in a woman because she is moist in bed. I do not regard scratching and pleasure to be more important than good principles. My failures are due more to the Rahab in my skin than in my mind.

You say that I whore after wisdom. What advantages have I gained, either in lucre or in reputation or in friends? I smart, because I have no money for my two sons, and because there is not a soul on the earth to whom I could turn for a potato, a cruet of honey or a loaf, am I then the harlot of Tyre? Is every man base who covets the asses and oxen of Jacob? Are not the denials that the World heaps like an Aetna upon my back sufficient for you?

What deity is there in the heart of man who assails a man as stricken as I am? what jot of God, tender grass, or Klymene or Arbute, is there in a man who is so niggard with himself as to refuse a man, who has been his buckler since he learned there was the Immortal Word, an evening for talk? At least my sins are not apart from a desperado fervor for the artful human beast. I have never been a

skinflint about my time with you, and it would not be arrogant or gross to remind you that generally whenever I have given you a day or a week, you have departed from me with a knowledge of ancient scribes and sages you had not previously known. I never thought it more essential to rush to Homer or Strabo or Porphyry than to converse with a friend. I read the Masters to talk better to a friend. I believe that literature is the health of man, and that he who does not regard it so, will bring to himself the Erynes.

You question my praise of your Muse. Yesterday, I wrote to Laughlin, asking him to remove my work from the New Directions Annual, and print in its place your essays on Melville and Hawthorne and THE TEMPEST.

I have always reckoned a friend greater than any woman; women pass out of our lives, like the sea and the tides and autumn leaves. The more, in a way, we die unto life, the deeper is our need for friends. I say a poet does not trouble himself about being alone. He has all the solitude that the soul can endure; sometimes it is a rapture and often it is abominable ennui. But no man with some judgment has to ask God or men or even a woman for privacy. We will all be privy dust in a short space of time. Let then death take care of our private nature, or the soul which is perhaps the same thing; I depend upon the Angels for my will and my fate.

Christ is doubtless an artist, because his Allegory is not at all temporal.

I regard your large, Jovean, laughing face with the greatest esteem and affection, and believe in your Behemoth dimensions. You are an extraordinary, gluttonous human animal, and for all your intellect, you are sometimes like huge Ajax when he is furiously slaying sheep he mistakes for men.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.?]
friday november 18 xlix

edward, my sheep

you turneth away wrath you make such beautiful change! it is hard for a fool of beauty like me to keep from falling in the honey-pot, my knowing knave

and who else but such a wit and brain as you shall i be furious with? the rest, as Alyosha sd, (and was it not you who quoted?), shall be treated as children or as the mad?

i allow i am ajax, and thank you for exposing me to myself: to learn and to educate, these are the only functions the only trouble is, do you, may you, learn from me? i am honestly too modest—la! to know

i abhor it, but today, and too often, i am as happy as sophocles is reported to have been for 80 years that narrow difference between man and animal is such a matter of hairs

do, edward, forever, hesitate to make up sums of what you give such addition has, against the Pleiades, to be made by the recipient every time you count coups you rob us of the future, for a man must keep his scalp, at all costs, even the loss of the learning, of the gift to come i do not forget one thing: that you must always bank on ingratitude, as Lear found out, is too easy a charge do you not trust cordelia who heaves her heart out not easily?

and you are a sweet fool to cancel you for me in Mister loklins annual 1920: master, let us go hand in hand, you who are sure, i who am not, and thus finish so little! & know less

i send you thyme for your lintel from my door in the quickest possible answer to your courtesies

which is a form of love,
YOUR CELT

[added in script]
they are the lighthearted races, & therefore enjoy nothing,

obviously, so much as cracking of skulls—
the Iliad is full of 'em
their morbidity is altogether pervasive, children of the sun.
The earth (darkling, you'd say) they flee.
Persephone is never of their making. Nor their Mother. So women are always their sisters, or little girls, whom they run with, play with as their equals, & whom they slay, as deers It is time, the sun breeds slayers, makers of spring, & slayers. There it is,—Celts light, light, thin with it, & only in love with the dark, which they never know. How can they? This blood does not go down, races out. And they like to see it, out. They remember nothing but what has stood out in space. You dark men roost in woman as cave. They, the splinters, want to dance, only to dance, & slay. They are without suspicion, stupid, gay, think the world is a hangout leading to a scrap. O, what shall men do with these empty-heads, before they destroy us, we who favor the beat, not the color of, blood? What shall we do, to bring them down, the laughing ones who do not have beautiful teeth?

[New York City]
March 24, 1950

Dearest Charles,—

I am deeply charmed by the BILLY BUDD COMMENT. Your prose becomes more warmly flesh, and is as toothsome and vain as Absalom. I am altogether of your feeling regarding BILLY BUDD, although I was not so years ago, but I think you are right; the mirth and the myrrh of your lines prove, as you say, what the dullards cannot fathom. Yes, to cite you again, we always go farther with our flesh; perhaps our disgraces teach us more than the virtues we believe we own. Do you own a virtue? No one has even lent me one. I relish, too, your desolate interrogation, "Is this a winter's tale, a master's "TEMPEST?" And finally, a very brilliant line you make in, "as though the hand that wrote was Hawthorne's, with his essayisms, his hints, the veil of his syntax."

It was gifted of you, Charles, to send me your only copy.

I am just getting out of my Heinesque mattress-grave. Today, I walked in the sun for the first time, with acacia-reveries in my hebraic heart, and I pined for hazel-nut, and dog-wood, and the pebbles Numa Pompilius employed to augur. I am still weak; but I want to go soon to the anointed tables of the Masters and feed.

I returned the galleys to London, and the book should be out in England in April, perhaps not till May. I added a small essay-poem to the book, called BELLEROPHON.

I am pleased that the homage to you charms your palate, and I hope Constanza will be delighted with the cadenced reference to her. New Directions has already announced the forthcoming publication of THE FLEA OF SODOM, and it should be done here a month or so after London publication.

I have just had word that Herbert Read has done "a very glowing introduction." In the catalogue, English, Read writes that "Dahlberg is one of the greatest writers of our time." My dear, good Charles, I appeal to your rogueish, and Mercury-fingered wit, Who is greater than Dahlberg except Goliath the stupid?

I am glad that you care for the RATIONAL TREE more than you surmise, and only beg you, you nimble-fingered Autolycus, that when you pilfer from me, that you do so with more exactness. Heraclitus did not say what you aver he said. It was Empedokles who said it, and he wrote it quite differently. Let me sharpen that Mind of yours: "The blood around the heart is the thought of men." Your own garbling of this remarkable line is not bad, not at all; it is quite good. Now, if you can mutilate another writer's text with as much skill, you are likely to turn out to be a very talented man, almost as great and blunt as Anak himself. But I confess, you steal as only a Genius can, and who should know better than I?

Did you ever get Maximus of Tyre? Soon as I have some health I shall look for it, and when I find it, I shall tell you. By the way, the allusion to Eliot is quite droll; the exchequer saint of anglo-american

literature should have more such Aesopian sleight-of-hand.

I shall send this to you, special delivery; the mail-carrier will doubtless awaken you about three in the afternoon, and you will revile me, until you read all my Volpone flatteries, and no man who speaks of frankincense so lovingly as you do, will be able long to resist my epistolary gaieties.

Do we all live in the Garden of Sodom, Charles? I can tell you I want the sweet, nectar-apples of Venus. Am I as feminine as the Earl of Oxford? I will love a man amorously with my mind, but not after the stygian manner of Galba or Nero or Caligula.

Let me hear from you soon, my good, gifted friend, ay, very opulently gifted, and take with this my love for you and Constance, the low hills, the sweet Pleiad Milk Maids, and may Heaven be kind, for I am pining to leaf and to flow swift again as an evening, pebbly river piercing through a moon-painted vale.

Your loving friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
April 19, 1950

My dear Charles,—

Thanks deeply for the letter and the kind notes and epistles you are sending out for my bread. I had hoped the Homage to you would be in the mail, but I doubt that I can get an extra set for you. I have not seen the original galleys of it yet, and wrote asking for it again. THE FLEA should be out, I imagine, in May. It was to appear this month, but I could not get what galleys were sent corrected because of sickness, and then I insisted on page-proofs, not wishing to see page 10 on page 27. If I do it it is all right, or so I imagine. I am eager for you to see the BELLEROPHON; originally, it was a portrait of you, and then I got baited by my own vices, and now it is you and

me, and may Heaven and the Dragon protect both of us from each other and ourselves. I hope the Homage will be good on the page and give you that pleasure that dogwood and April and the unavenging flowers afford us.

I go to Middletown Thursday evening to stay there much of Friday, anyway, and will call Cornelius Krune. Snow constantly asks that you join me. He wants you to come up. He thinks I have the power to pull you out of the Washington Tombs. O my good friend, I have some lines on Acheron solitude in Bellerophon! Yea, I have fevered Iliums, but who has the Boreal blasts to blow you out of feral privacies.

Thanks very much for sending the charming little trade edition of the POEMS. There are some sweet chanting lines out of the honeycomb of your [vines? veins?]. Sing More, More.

My teaching ends this May, and I must get out of that college; there's nothing for me but being the academic grammar charwoman, and on a part-time basis. I am really worried about the summer months. So far I can't get enough reviewing on the Times. And you see how puling and small I must be. O to get some crumbs from the anointed table of the American hack. But how stupid must I be? In my own right, and without the help of nature, I am capable of huge stupidities, but if some demand idiocy of me, then I go proud, and alone. Like you, my fine Bellerophontic solitary.

Why don't you come down; I am at the moment intellectually slack, and I promise not to be more vapid than you, but a little adhesive companionable relaxation, some good, lumpish inertia, this is my bread, my leaven that I offer you. I picked up the Book of the Dead the other day. When a man finishes a book he dies, and I have not come up yet out of the grave.

I have half a mind to do a play, half Elizabethan and half Restoration, before going into a Tragic Poem. I do not know. I know nothing these days, and I am no meek braggart when I say so. There is nothing wily or Phoenician about this remark. It is the only truth I

have in my flesh. I leaf, I bud, but only as the animals do because it is the season to do so, and not because I have the Will from the Apocrypha or one of the Apocalypses for it. I have no will, and that would be a horrible vice, were I in a loathsome mood.

Well, this isn't a letter or a confession. It is a budding April velleity, the grass leaps up in hidden places, the violets pulse at eventide, and when Sancho Panza trumpets to me from some vale or glad hill, I shall bring him a russet leaf from last fall.

My love to you and Constanza
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[in script on torn note paper, both sides]
Charles, The Homage on page iii is not set as I had wanted it to be. At first the printer *omitted!* it. I was quite frantic to think the Homage to you, should have been so put upon the page, so that it would be apparent that the Bellerophon is dedicated to you. Please forgive me! it is not my fault: Some day, and again pardon me for being the Braying Ass, or let me Bray for a week or so, when this Book is reprinted, for some young Skelton, or Smart or Olson, the correction can be made, for I would not give you anything in penury— — —

Again my love
EDWARD

[New York City]
May 17, 1950

Dearest Charles:

I am replying at once to *your card.* I, too, take joy in the marriage of our names. THE FLEA, my dear Friend, is to be published in London next month. How soon I shall have copies after that I do not know. But you will have a book as quickly as I can mercury one to you.

I continue till the end of this month to be the academic char-

woman of syntax. The journey to Middletown was futile. All that depraved and pallid foliage of learning there sends me to Erebus. I saw little Trilling at a cafeteria table in the faculty club at Columbia. He has that yellow, sere face seasoned in hell, and the bulby, glazed eyes of the despicable ferryman, Charon. The Matthew Arnold man! I have done another hack review for the Times, and if I was not inadvertently intelligent, they may print it. I am trying to compromise, you see! I have always said that the reason I have never compromised is that no one ever tempted me. It is true, in a sense, and I am like that noisy Paul sold unto carnal lust. Aside from this, I have the most holy fervor of the heart to write, let Satan and Rahab point the finger at me, and each claim me as his orthodox devotee. I want to do a poem, a parable, on that obstreperous, and lusting and alienating Paul. I have also been rereading Blake, and bought a fine copy of THE BOOK OF THE DEAD, which Blake used for so many of his allusions.

I may have a job as an assistant professor for four weeks, lecturing on American Literature, and will have occasion to celebrate CALL ME ISHMAEL. I must read Parkman, and some muck-rakers. The other day I was looking at THE CONFIDENCE MAN. So much bitterness, and so little upsoaring power to wing it. Poor Melville, I cannot believe that either Hawthorne or America balked him. There is some deeper, metaphysical devil of aridity in his soul. No man can either harm himself or be ruined by another. Baudelaire, for all of his orthodoxies of satanism, foolish man, he was not content with the vices nature had so lavishly provided him with, he had to labor for more sins, was no more evil than his original nature. What a hapless folly, for you cannot add one turpitude to your soul, nor subtract one from it. And so no matter what he did, he could not be less or more. That is not strictly speaking determinism, and Baudelaire thought there was some free will in man. It is a good creed to have. I sing of the Tree of Life, and chant vice and sin and error, and let the good and the evil, and not reason, take care of the song.

It is incredible how little talent there is in the world. I am reading a very bad novel for review, and no matter how badly I should write, even as hurriedly as I am making these words, I would, maybe, be apt to make one living, upspringing, phrase. So long as I have my faculties, I shall go to Cana, to Joppa, to the wilderness of Beersheba to make the stones speak. I will walk in slain hills, and there find the wild honey in the carcase.

Write me soon, will you?

I send you my loving friendship, and bless your Muse.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
wed. june 7 '50

edward, my friend,

the howling way i was, i have continued to be, roaring from a storm which heaves up from the hidden places (are they forever sexual?

Lear, even Lear, stayed obsessed.

And so

a man better eh?

(Is it all we do, to recreate parenthoods? to bring back into existence he was our Adam, she who was Goddess?)
To prove, prove, that we are born?

)o,

smell the blood, fellow(

And so i kept on, carrying you, thinking remembering

yr voice

And awaiting THE FLEA.

(what, in the world, shall i say? eh?

"what is narrative?"

& exactly in what way does dahlberg's return to old resonators, pro-
ject
eh?

Myself, the last thing was, a attempt to do a story which was not, to make verse come rasslin out of prose, as tho it was difficult, had to swim for its life, the prose returning, and giving way

some lines, perhaps

(((This is a new 2nd machine (my own just broke down) and I have trouble with it, as you see,—and which you will, please, excuse)))

I am very happy. How are you, Edward? And where will you take yrself out of, the heat? (It is just here, the last two days, and both satisfies me, and gives me a headache. Washington is a swamp. There is some chance I may be along yr way soon. It is time I went on, for a bit. Will let you know.

& it pleaseth me, that Paul is to feel yr sting. For he has long deserved it, noisy Paul, Paul who does not have rosy flesh, who was the 1st one on the wire, to make the Trilling.

I treasure, fr yr letter, "no man can either harm himself or be ruined by another." It is beautiful, and is to be added to such other dahlberg aphorisms, as I am collector of! You use the simplest sort of statement hugely, my friend. (You once praised my short sentence, alas!)

And yes, it is not form but chant you are, — how shall I say that, to those who do not know *either*? "let the good and the evil, and not reason, take care of the song": hic fecit.

(hah, my friend: either you steal, or, again, we make doublet, for you talk like the KINGFISHERS concludes itself: did you ever see it?)

I do not read, these days. But I am full of reference. Was surprised, doing a

long verse, for the first issue of a magazine which was to have been born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, (think of it!), to have Anthony of Padua flying over the roofs where the gulls shit! and blessing my city for me!

It was called

I, MAXIMUS

(and it was he, of another sea-city, who was, of course, in my mind

(((whom, by the way, I have not yet had a copy of, fr that hunger of mine, edward the Sharp: here, here)))

O, yes, one thing which would please you, is, that I am now (by my wits) the owner of a water color of Lawrence's, one of the very few outside of the collections of them that he left to Vence

it is of a man pissing into daffodils, and retains DHL's whole sense of the cycle of nature

(And all I did to get it, was to sell a Lawrence collection I stumbled on in a bookstore, to the Lib. of Congress.)

It is a very nice fetish to have. (I lost—to, of all the possible creatures, Mark Some-No-Body—the chance to do, for Viking, the preface to a new collected poems of L: it was a thing I wanted very much to do, for he is still fertile to me.)

here i am swetting into my eyebrows, and hungry, and quite, quite silly, and so i shall stop, asking you to receive this more, as a token of love than of intelligence.

Fr yr friend, and
who invokes on you,
all, all
benificences, particul
arly, rosy flesh

OLSON, CHARLEY

[New York City]
june 17, 1950

dearest Charles,—

you should have a quick reply to your budding summer letter. i thank you for the sun, the grass and the june you emit. i know the pollen of flowers and the savory sweet of stalks, and all that equatorial sexual love you have, which warm days and cool, blowy evenings, yes i know this furioso season of the flesh, but at this long moment of ennui i am in a desperado misery, and for that reason did not write you at once to praise your letter and to thank you for the balm and the gilead of it.

the book, you say, should be a comfort; you're a writer, my friend, a very fine and noble one, tell me, what is it to make a book, ay, fine and quick for the soul to make, and when it is made, a sin, and a folly and a disgrace, for how can you make a book out of virtue, which no one possesses but liars and soup and money hacks. so we've made a book, why then miserable toad, adder, and summer croaking frog, go and make another folly, sin and disgrace for another book. i have no solace in books, nor can i say with aughte else but tombstone laughter that a book finished is just a cold ague, to be printed, and misread, o let us not be fancy, just by three or four or seven to get to hyperbole, why seven that's a planet of people. you might, charles, if you've the mind to, write to harvey breit and ask whether you can do a times review of the flea; otherwise i shall of a certainty have that m[o]cking fleabite of a fate; you know the little dagger silence.

do you believe the universe has moral ears; that sounds droll and rather assish; or let us so phrase it, do you think the earth hears our cries, and that when the heart bleeds herbs and mallow and rush spring up along some woodland mushroomed marge? or that we carry in us our fates, and it requires the greatest faith in absolutes we break at night or in midday boredom and dead affliction, to sharpen a constellation of a fate for ourselves.

the book, i mean the littlefleabite of a verse and prose and parable, should be out in london the last part of july, and here on the 28th of the same july, six days after my fiftieth birthday. does that sound eerie or decayed or mummied, fifty years old, that's hardly an achievement in itself, and shall i say, now that i am close upon the fiftieth year, i have learning, and books, and shall we use that cute little word, genius, the philistines have preempted, shall we say it, no we guess we better not. this is quite irrelevant, but baudelaire says that sexuality is just the lyricism of the masses. that'll make you laugh, whether you agree or not, and he also says that pederasts require intelligent women for conversation. give me the intelligence of the soft breasts, the learned feminine fingers, the erudition of her lips, but that's banal too. i mean particularly that erudition of her lips.

two little yogi artists may come to see you, one you know, biala's brother. he once came to me and said, "i have wanted to talk to you for fifteen years, but i always feared to approach you." "alright, that's fine," i said, "let's talk," and he did, for fifteen years, but when i saw that i was as wretched as ulysses on the barren sea and that the twentieth year was about to revolve, i got up, and went back to my room.

i've been reading kierkegaard; youd probably be very vexed with him; he writes about dialectics of history, and finitude and finity, but he had great sickness of soul, and he was not a philistine. consider the lilies, charles, they toil nor spin not, nor make deceitful books; why a book is an infernal lie, spun out of vanity and out of the raiment of solomon and many winds.

now when will i hear from you?

how is constanza? i cannot find up till now your maximus of tyre, save in the original language at daubar and pine. youre a latinist? i have no languages, only sometime deceiving myself into imagining that i write a little english, but write it when i cannot in the holy cave but by the devil's tombs.

you have my love and my friendship; but consider the lilies that toil not, and when you are so bored that you can sup upon it, why

then make a book. i know no other relief from this unrelieved monotony men call the world or the planet or that strange little thing of skin and malice that is called man, or the foolishness of trees, flowers and streams and the ways of a maid.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
sunday june 25 1950

edward, my lad, that was a sweet awakening, my scoundrel, only, you got my brains in their best but least wary mood, and so i add this note to our talk, to be precise about some certain things, mostly

Jas. (pronounced jazz, as his intimates call 'im!). For he is an important instrument, and I want one day, in my own rhythm, to "have him". But the time has not yet come, and the little incidents-accidents which have happened I like, just as they have happened, which I want you to know, so that you have the record, and will, I think, see the plot this "stage manager" (please, in Goethe's sense, please, not in—o High Critick!—any too shrewd a sense!)

((in fact it is quite simply, rhythmic, and, because, of the way it got off so bad, with Jas., there, so long ago, in Mary's Kitchen, there, in cambritch, I am having some sort of a delightful playwriting with him, unknown to him, of course,) which I want to let work out, as it works out, without any push on 'im, because, actually, the

whole thing is sort of a game of innocents (for he is, literally, an innocent. And I?, and, whatever the issue (the reason why it is delightful, just as it is, is, that, in the end, Jas. is going to have to do my will, so long as he is the publisher he is))

this stage manager is managing!

The two recent developments are, (1), *The Praises*, a long verse, which he will, as i told you, issue in ND#12, next December; and (2) the Melville iconograph, which he offered me, himself, right out of the blue (the blue of St Moritz, and, of—o, snow, at eventide), all, ALL, *by himself* (ain't it, bee-yoot-i-full! fellow artificer?)

(1) first: it happened this way: West, editor of the Western Review, took the pome on receipt of it, but then, in the dark, one of my enemies (I have 'em, too, Edoard!) put the knife into me, one Paul Engle ("The Continent Screams", En-geld), and by god if West the pitiful creature, doesn't go and welch on himself, turning the pome back to me with the suggestion, it is too long, and, mebbe, a publisher like Laughlin, would be interested. So, to my own amazement (to allieve the anger, even after I had tore off a two page letter to West,—a straight Dahlbergism givin' same the LESSONS of, life!), I up and ship it to Jas., who, also to my amazement, TAKES IT (1st time, Jas. has taken, and I, pleased, in a way, pleased, yes, sure, I, too, would very much like to be,—o, well, not so much now, but once—a ND "writer", one of those . . . .

(2) the other was quite different, was, as I say, HIS initiation, based, I suppose, on ISH, which he was quite gentle about, when it appeared, (had, in fact, before Reynal took it, suggested he have a look at it,

and I, not doing, because I was, even then, going along this same path of timing with Jas., what I have described above)

(he was at the time, spring, 1947, on the Coast, and it was gratifying, the way he up, and from the talk there—I imagine it was mostly the review the S.F. Chronicle had carried, thO, perhaps, it was a little Rexroth, whom I did not then know. Anyhow, he did, up, and write a letter, which, for Jas., was something!)

date (now)

(((interruption: add one other detail: I had, Jan., 1949, sent him, for NDAnnual last year, AHAB, A DANCE (the thing done for the Graham Company, prose and verse))))

date April 20, 1949, letter, fr. Jas., asking, wld you do iconography (photos etc., with intro by O on HM)

((Attractive to me, a twin to ISH: I blocked it out, have, still, 5 page plan))

May 20, same (more on same)

June 13, same: saying, "I'm afraid you will think I am an Indian giver, or someone who cries 'wolf! wolf!" (O No) but since I wrote you, things have taken a very bad turn in the book business in general, and I think that we ought to delay this Melville project until we get into the next economic upsurge."

So that's that. And it's okay with me, that it is, though it is only in this sense of letting the things come out of Jas., at the moment, as I have indicated it has come out, not any unwillingness either to do the Melville book, or, to have him publish verse of mine. (As I sd to you on the telephone, about a year from now I sort of figure I shall be wanting to move in a little more on him, that's all.))

As a matter of fact, between you and me, what I am reaching for, with no one's

knowledge, certainly, not Jas., is, a book of verse by O issued by ND, say, 1952. (It looks now as though a chapbook of verse will come out, Golden Goose Press, about spring, 1951—and there has been, for a year now, another slated, called THE PRAISES, from a printer in San Francisco; but I guess that's a dead duck, no word from him in a year). So, Jas.—well, you see, I have plans for him!
[added in script along left margin to bottom of page]
I sort of think I push "Melville jobs" off, ahead, simply to get "Olsons" out there, sufficiently, to make "Melvilles" sit, properly, where they belong, on me, [ ] on me as—a sort of H M Son: though you, perhaps exclusively, see ISH as Olson-act, remember "the World", & how lazy, how stupid, how unromantick, it is!

That took altogether too long, but I wanted you, Edward to see the whole picture, have the whole record, and understand my way of working along with Jas. (You see, I am gratified, that you tell me, he is well-disposed my way. That's fine, and, if it stays that way, a year from now, or so, it will be really usable. Thanks.

As a matter of fact, who the hell else is there beside him, in the publishing business? He has damned well done the one continuing job, of them all. And he deserved our applause. (It was one proof, wasn't it, that FLEA . . . I await it eagerly, and I shall drop a note to Harvey soon (better to be cool, with that fellow, he is so scared of, us HAMMERERS!)—and though I am scared to death about doing of the review (it is not my form whatsoever, nor my way of putting my sense of you forward: you are too close to me for those public places: too close, for critique—for critique as I imagine critique, that is)
but, for you, I'll do, do, do, do

This is no answer whatsoever to the magic of that special of yrs, which was rich and sharp (yr wisdom has now a hardness (of the surface of water from which, — I

steal from a friend, in quite other relevance — stones skip before they plunge) so fine, the ironic, the sort of lying like a Saturn overthrown

. . . . . .

but is just a note, to fill you out, and, also, to send you

love,
CHARLES

[Washington, D.C.]
Tuesday, July 20 [1950]

My dear Edward:

I am going to make this a note deliberately: I must get out of this humid house and go to the gallery where it is cool and a man's head can be Duccio Buonisegna's sea, which is grass, and the fish are fish in grass, and Jesus and Peter and James are fisher men and Siena was a christian place when spirit was alive as fish are alive, and grass.

(Which has not been true since? I picked up a book of Dostoevsky's short stories the other day and read it on a train and was not interested as I once was interested and was struck again with the accuracy of your discussion of Dostoevsky's ennuie, and the root of it in sex.)

Saying these things I am suddenly aware of why I am interesting myself at the moment in Giovanni di Paolo. It is a double research, against suavity in art and spirit. I prefer his "St Clare" and "St Nicholas of Torentino" to Sasetta (I do not know his "St John the Baptist" in Chicago). I take it, his awkwardness is a clue. He, and Domenico Veneziano. And the insistence on the small subject. All quantity has sickened, and suavity is the Picasso of that big and competent world. I begin to see why I want small plays, 2, 3 people,

woodwinds, no set: chamber theatre, music, painting. It is a point of beginning.

I said a note. It is two weeks late. Something told me I should have shot off to you a card, even, to say, do send the FLEA when you have it. I await it. (I thought to write a letter and, instead, went off to Philadelphia to rub against the beast and make my own fur rise.)

Yrs,
CHARLES

[added in script]
A propos Keats:

have you noticed the hidden poem called

an epistle
a letter to Reynolds?

(It is in the 1925 ed. of Poems & Letters, Houghton Mifflin, p. 241)
(March 25, 1818) (Also see letter, p. 295, & note, p. 461)

I honor him as much for that as anything.

55 morton street
Apartment 7 L
new york city, n.y.
july 21, 1950

dear charles,—

i have moved to 55 morton street, apartment 7 L, and my phone number, not listed, is algonquin 5-33 68. please, charles, give no one my address or number. i have had mail forwarded to you, and pray it is not too much bother for you to send any letters that may come to you to me. sheets were sent out july 6th, and though laughlin is anxious to publish the book soon, i wonder whether august would not be a poor month for that. tell me what you think.

got word from herbert read; he said a professor had asked him to

suggest candidates for the nobel award. read mentioned me, and the professor took this as a coarse jest, read was quite vexed with the academic epigone.

have been reading kierkegaard, blake; the eye ailment has given me great trouble. hope to go into poetry and parables soon, but not without more books in me. i mean more reading. have done some hack reviews; the baudelaire will be out in august in the times. all that can bring me is perhaps some notice at the churl's academies of learning, and maybe some one may yield up a decent job at an indecent college. you will have, of course, charles, the flea soon as i receive copies. i think the books have been bound in england.

this is, alas, a slack epistle, and i apologize to you; my energies this morning are scant. i need the ocean salt, but fear that no such tonical poseidon will be mine this summer.

meanwhile, what do you? this matter of making a book, a whore's book with angelical visions, with the aid of theuth, lucifer's foot, and heaven, is a hard enigma. i am still looking for maximus of tyre. have you stumbled upon any new reading? routledge has brought out the complete smart, and i have asked them to send it. i have made no mention of you to laughlin, but then, my wily nautical mariner, it seems to me my past efforts for you were never bootless. the mistakes i have made i have committed in my own behalf! don't worry, you are as skittish as the foal, the ass's colt that entered the gates of jerusalem. i happen on admirers of yours often. so don't drop into any evil pits or snares of despondency. ishmael is in my mind, and when the time comes, [nod? knock?] at new directions, so don't bridle your chimera, ill fathom that possibility, unless you rather i would not, and i don't say that slyly at all, for i just don't know what plans in sheol or in earth or in the seas you are devising at some far end of no time.

my blessings upon you, and my love to you and constance. let me have your word, for i am not only hungry for the barley loaves and the fishes, but also for the miracles.

your devoted friend,
EDWARD

[added to margin of first page]
Just got word the Flea to be published July 24

wash
monday july 24 50

my dear friend Edward:

Nor shall I, apparently, go to the seas this summer. So if you too cannot watch yr kine of Poseidon play by it, in case it is any alleviation to share your city imprisonment, we share.

And so yr mail will be handled by yr postman, & readily, my friend, as readily as when he was a lettercarrier, and you met him.

(Strange drops & syntax this morning, Edward! It is always so, when one meets that stranger, the blood, again, after a night's sleep, at least when one is tired, and needs salt sea to spine & sponge the rote of same—is it not so?)

There is a friend here who has a car, and we have been using Sundays (Constanza's only day off) to make quick trips to the extraordinary meadows and rivers on which the Civil War was fought: a week ago Harper's Ferry & Antietam, or, what I prefer the Rebel name of Sharpsburg; before that Manassas. And yesterday, four of the fields of the terror, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, Spottsylvania Court House. It is very weird, how much it was Anderson's blueberry America that was the time & people of these frightful places of slaughter. And how they sit now, as they did, 100 years ago, a few monuments, but crops, fishing rivers, the same stone bridges, & wilderness roads, even such churches as Salem Church, Wilderness Church, standing where they were, white as the bones of the men were, the bones you do not now see. But wood outlasts men, and there at Spottsylvania, at the Bloody Angle, on the edge of the woods, I stumbled on an abatis, with the sticks still

sharpened and raised like snakes to impale a Fed coming in from the forest. (The past is prologue)

And so, in my reading, where am I? Not here, but in Sumeria, Cappadocia, Baluchistan, and farther back, against the melting ice, what my friend Sauer calls Mankato Substage! For my old obsession of space works in to time, by time's back door. (I finished last week an argument on the problem of verse now, which, in perhaps too muscular a way, brings all this speculation together. And I succeeded so in intimidating the editors of Poetry New York by it, that you shall see it soon. They are bringing it out in their issue August-September.

But it is nothing. I do not care for critique unless it is made parable as you have made it, and I do not seem to. I more and more take it, that, so far as I am concerned, critique, like argument, properly belongs previous to the act of composition. And so I go, daily, on, from one verse, to another, trying in each, to make each obey that form it seems to my slow growing eye and ear it demands.

I wrote to Harvey to suggest I do a critique of FLEA, however. And when you say, the 24th July, TODAY!, does that mean the American FLEA or the English? It is most exciting news. Do keep me posted on reviews. For is it not a measure of our contemporaries, how they put their hand to one Edward Dahlberg? But this is nothing. What is something, is, that it is out, for those who can find it. Keep me fully posted, my friend.

So write me soon, and, if you are of a mind to share my curiosities, look at some cylinder seals of those Sumerians!

All love,
CHARLES OLSON

[Washington, D.C.]
Tuesday, August 1, 1950

Edward! Edward!

[Paragraphs 1-4, 8-9, 14 and the hand-written conclusion have been bracketed in soft pencil, probably by Dahlberg]

It is as Bellerophon, of Bellerophon that I will write you today. For you have so made the Sign of me, and I am so atremble to be inscribed to in such Connection, that this is enough for the first day of the life of this extraordinary Book which you have so quickly put into my hands and which, in its Enigma and its Beauty, already enlarges me. But. I have suffered too much, Edward, to speak easily of the sage & parable you have put forth here.

I thank you, thank you, deeply, to be made a part of it—and to have the beautiful words of Rhodope who knew what a fablist is, and of—how deeply correct you are—the Amorite Whore, instead of all present dirtiness, put there by you as the gate Prouti through which I entered, bending the head, of this temple of your bones.

And that an Error has put my name as well in Beliar as in Bellerophon, is to double the Honor, for, having read it too today ((I have had to struggle to get beyond that "Author's Note" which now, in print, seems even more remarkable to me than it did in mss., as deep & gifted & engaging a two pages as I can think of: so rich is it, so, to use your lovely word, as lovely a word almost as, of woman, that she pleasure us, is your word, replenishing)) I put it with my first love for the story of the Flea: it is another scimitar into the rotten belly (how you urge the Wheel, press it in on . . .

But who is Bellerophon? You wondrously say, he is a sea-nature of the Muses. He is. For he is the son of my Glaucus, half fish, half man, he who was my father, the father of all Phoenicians, Barat or Panch, who was the king of the Flood and, surviving, found fire again and thus was also Prometheus, whom we have heard of, in the Caucasus.

The first of the curious things, however, is that Bellerophon's

grandfather was Sisyphus. This is surprising because Sisyphus was the unknown father of Odysseus! (He waylaid Odysseus' mother on her way to marry Laertes, the story goes.) But then you've sd it, you've sd, Bellerophon is Odysseus the artist—or do you know what you've sd, when you've made it conceivable that an Odysseus should be an artist? (Is it at all possible that the Bear's Son—for so Sisyphus is, the Bear, the cunning one, Homer calls him, most cunning, "much-knowing" says Alcman, two poets who are not moralists (two that are, Hesiod & Pindar, put it differently, the first saying Sisyphus is a man "of shifty plans," the other, the State or Grandpa Poet, saying, "Shrewdest in devices". (We know now, how Odysseus was marked!)

Which gets us ahead. For, in the light of that peculiar melancholy which settled down on Bellerophon when he was getting old, it is also Sisyphus who throws some possible clue—, though I should mislead you, if you thought I thought this was the answer. Why was Sisyphus compelled to push at a rock? That he might not, a SECOND TIME, escape from death! For he did, the first time, and revealed god-plans. (We shall want to remember this, later, as of the third figure in this puzzle of who was Bellerophon-Odysseus-Hercules? For Gilgamesh, older than any of them, in search for an end to this ache of death, went to Utanapistim (another Barat or Noah) and through him found out that the seed of life was buried at the bottom of the sea, where he went, and found it, only, in his joy, to have a snake steal it out of his fingertips.) (With this in our minds, with the Cave of the Sea to the Cave of the Bear, shall we wonder that Bellerophon and Odysseus are of the same line?

The second of the curious things is, that it is not at all in Greece, not even in Ionia, that the events of Bellerophon's life take place. We are told he was driven from Arkadia because a Potiphar's wife (this Peloponnesus of exile) paid him off this way, drove him off. But this, if we will believe Apollodorus, was a decadent story. Apollodorus asks us to see in Bellerophon a deeper "cause" (it is the cause, it is, the cause). But more of that, later.

Or should we delay, any further, the real gloss to the text of Edward Dahlberg? It is true, that in his "Bellerophon" Dahlberg does not speak of death as the dying of the mortal touch, but only of the dying of knowledge, the danger of the instrument of knowlege, the mind, which, in this extraordinary interpretation, he identifies with, as, go low, he says, Bellerophon, come down, O learned Dust! But elsewhere in the enigmas and single-sentenced parables of this clay tablet which he has called the Flea of Sodom, he does disclose how, that the Earth bleeds back the blood of the murdered, especially of a man's kin, is a cause, is a cause that man is restless, nomad, hunter, Beliar, for ever in unrest, unable, as the Seer demands of man, that he sit, if he would humble, his head, go low.

Now Bellerophon, the myth-mongering Greek poets had it, successfully attacked, in this order, the Chimera (sez Dahlberg, Pride, thinking, perhaps of Perseus mirror, by which he did not have to look upon the face, the beloved face, of his "mother"); then those mountain giants, those Cyclops, the Solymi ("lawless heart-rock" Dahlberg calls these Pelasgians, these crude first people, these eaters, "extinct Centauric crags" of dead knowledge, Dahlberg also says, wise as he is about knowledge); the third of his tasks, this peculiar horse-riding Herakles, was to slay the Amazons, an incident Dahlberg leaves entirely untouched, it is curious to note, perhaps because he sees, in the Chimera, a female of the man himself, sufficient to include these other exaggerated women; and last, before he gets—I sd these decadent Greek poets—the girl, & the kingdom, he slays the finest of all the warriors of her people, the Lukki or the Lycians.

There is much blood that Bellerophon spills, though none of this blood, apparently, is the kind of blood to become a curse, for even, as I have sd, though he kills the Lycians themselves as well as such monsters as the Chimera, the Solymi, the Amazons, yet, he is rewarded with half the kingdom of his father-in-law, begets three children, and, you'd think, would be left alone—would be, that is, if this whole tale of Homer were not some late and degenerate lie. (It is as

though Homer proved Dahlberg right, his Bellerophon is such a piece of the mind, is such a bad mural by Polygnotus, is, a faery tale, even to the horse Pegasus, who has been so run into the ground by poets, even to the sword of Mercury. I honor Dahlberg, that he has, in one ambiguous sentence, saved the whole business from collapse:

> Bellerophon, astride Pegasus, he says, addressed his Furies, the raging, Iambic hoofbeats, each regards the perfect wisdom of high Zeus, 'Only he who is alone can be wise without being double'

I said, we should not delay any longer, the older & deeper the story. Best start with this queer horse. Is it not very strange that this horse was born out of the earth at the place on the earth where the blood from the neck of Medusa poured out when Perseus, that twin of Bellerophon, cut off her head?

I insert at this point a story from Pausanias, the story of another of these brother "heros", Alcmaeon. Pausanias tells us that when Alcmaeon had slain his mother Eriphyle, he came to Psophis in Arkadia (again, Arkadia, the home of the Cave of the Bear, the second home of the Lycians), but there the infection he had acquired on the death of his mother would not abate. He then went to Delphi, and the Pythia taught him that the only land where the avenger of Eriphyle could not dog him was the newest land which the sea had laid bare subsequently to the pollution of his mother's blood. And he found out the deposit of the river Achelous, and there, by that new and unpolluted land, he could be nourished, he could live.

Now we can unravel the ambiguity Homer offers us—and in offering us, saves his tale. Says he, suddenly, when all seems settled, when he is familied and landed, without warning, without cause, Bellerophon comes to be

> "Hated of all the gods. And in the Aleian plain apart
> He strayed, shunning men's footprints, consuming his own heart."

((What is very beautiful, in Mr Dahlberg's Wheel of Sheol, is, that Beliar, even, is made to suffer in the very opposite way, is made, because his wanton and drunken knowledge separated him from men, to cry out for a piece of human flesh, and in his loneliness so fierce, he falls down wherever he can just to lie in a fresh human footprint, like some poor crazed modern Sodomite, who, in this manner only, can cause the swollen seed to be spent.))

This Aleian plain. We are back to the sea. We are back to—now at the end of Bellerophon's life—to the reverse of all, to, the origin point. For what is this Aleian plain? it self a delta, and possibly the first important delta of civilized man, the delta of Cydnus, where Alexander got an infection, where the Caliph Mamum died of a chill, where the emperor Tacitus died, where, like the Emperor Julian, he was buried. Tarsus.

Is it not a curious place, Cilicia, for Bellerophon to end in? Why? Why he too must end in a DELTA, in a rich stoneless loam? stoneless Mesopotamian place? stoneless, my dear Dahlberg? where river & sea are joined, where men who are of water and of land are born, split men, perhaps, by concept as dangerous as race theory, but men who are civilizers, men who in delta bottoms begin towns, begin, Mohenjadaros, or such ports as Barat came from, LAGASH? (or Uruk (Erech)

WHY DOES BELLEROPHON END WHERE PHOENICIANS MADE A PORT?

Apollodorus, as I sd, has one answer. He says, what no one else hints: that Bellerophon has murdered in Arkadia, not his mother, but, unwittingly, his brother. And only on this NEW LAND, the Aleian plain, could he find a place to rest, could he find an absolution from the Earth, herself polluted, poisoned by the shed blood of kin.

I add one last curious thing, that Tarsus, this end point of Bellerophon, who, riding a horse born of the blood of one woman, slew another, is also the city which is said to have been founded by (1)

SANDAN who is local of Hercules; (2) by Hercules himself; (3) by PERSEUS. And that it was Iapetus or Japhet, the father of JAVAN or the Ionians, who named the river of that city "Cydnus".
[added in script]
Edward: this is token, TOKEN, of how you have *aroused* me! I enclose it, merely to TELL YOU. This has been a DAY.

Love, & astonishment, before the door of, yr WORK OF THE DAYS

love,
CHARLES

[Washington, D.C.]
Tuesday, july augst 2 50

edward:

i was broken off last night by the coming in from Mexico of a friend of Connie's i mention it, because it revealed you have a BELIEVER there, in Mexico City, a man—35, Billie says—who thinks you are the *onlie makyr*, who, when he heard that Olson knew Dahlberg (here! here!) was interested to know Olson! His name is Mike Rossene, comes from Cleveland, has only just now got himself a GI education, &, says Billie—it is how the whole thing came out—has ALL your books! (my only regret is, that, says same, he has a fine sense of humor, & his stuff is bought by the Atlantic Monthly!)

Now Constanza wants to have three copies of FLEA for friends, one of them a "poet" whose work she likes—as a matter of fact he is a "poet" in the old frenzy sense, the "personal" or lyrick mode (you will have a chance around Sept 1st to hear me on this mode—Poetry New York, at that time, brings out a long statement on PROjective Verse vs. the NON-projective (in which, by the way, you are acknowledged as the transmitter to this citizen of first principle necessary to OPEN or FIELD COMPOSITION). Will you, therefore, let us know where

we can buy copies? Does it mean waiting on Laughlin's edition? Or is Dauber & Pine handling Nevill copies?

I'll be honest, and hope I do not have to raise myself up soon and do a critique of you, my dear wise friend. For it is an overwhelming experience to have this book in my hand. You see, you are most close to me, I am here present, and, beyond all else, your images are some the very same images I have taken up for myself. And you may judge by the fluid state of that "essay" you got back on Bellerophon yesterday, that I am only now in mid-place, in this whole disposing of the more ancient past.

But if I should, it will be easier than I think, simply because one day has told me why it is I preferred the story "Flea" to the "Tree", say, why I prefer now "The Wheel" to yr "Bellerophon". It is FORM. Even in "Wheel" you have personages, "I"s, who fold the wisdom back into the vessel from which it came, it comes, you, the human, and, therefore, give the truths an energy and place in which they express themselves, a meditation, an intercession which creates the very thing you elsewhere (conspicuously in "B") make a statement of: in the "stories" and the "parables" the MORTAL TOUCH is present, is able to work directly on me, instead, as in the "essays", on the mind. IT is a wonderful thing, Edward, to do such INVOLUTIONS now.

Which brings me to the beauty of the PARABLES. (I should also congratulate you on the shape the book has been given, the fineness of its organization, opening on the FLEA, the WHEEL after TREE, and the PARABLES returning to yr FORM, the FORM which makes this book ADVANCE.)

Parable I is absolute, intimate, done, perfect in its image and its ambiguousness, all poured back into a thing self-made, self-existent: and such phrasing as "The birds are hurt, and the branches have slept" is the purest verse, the way they recur, as do the Griefless Cliffs (someone shall one day examine your imagery of STONE), in that rear of it all, "the branches and the birds are dry", and, suddenly, the Wind blowing."

One thing, Edward. When, either fr Nevill or Laughlin, you have press copies, there are two or three places where—if the publishers send them as of Olson—the book ought to be noticed:

(1) Robert Creeley, Editor, *Move*, Littleton, New Hampshire
(2) Richard Emerson, Editor, *The Golden Goose*, 1927 Northwest Blvd, Columbus, Ohio
(3) A. Wilber Stevens (and Kenneth O. Hanson), Editor, *Interim*, Box 24, Parrington Hall, University of Washington, Seattle 5, Wash.

Others, where I don't think my connection is strong enough to make a difference, but where the book ought to go, are:

Imagi, Editor Thomas Cole, Muhlenburg College, Allentown, PA
((Oh, yes, above (4): Rolf Fjelde, Editor, *Poetry New York*, 14 Avenue A, NYC
The Western Review, Editor, Ray West, the Univ. of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa
Wake, Editor Seymour Lawrence, 18 East 198th Street, NYC
The Montevallo Review, Editor Robert Payne, Montevallo, Alabama
The Voyager, Editor Vincent Ferrini, 3 Liberty Street, Gloucester, MASS
The Little Review Digest, Editor Rudd Fleming, 211 Elm Street, Chevy Chase, Maryland
The Quarterly Review of Literature, Editor T. Weiss, Bard College, Avondale-on-the-Hudson, NY

And let me know if such a mailing is possible, and when it goes out, so that I can be aware it is there, for pushing.

Oh, yes, it occurs to me. He praised you ambiguously, but he is aware of yr work (in the HUDSON REVIEW this winter bracketed you, DHL, and myself), and he is the bright boy, the new Kazin, with a particular knowledge of "myth". Laughlin, at least, should spare him a copy: Stanley Edgar Hyman, whose address I do not have, but I believe Westport, Connecticut, is sufficient.

So add to above (2nd list: they have had their chance at me, and rejected it, mit violence!) THE HUDSON REVIEW, P.O. Box 45, Village Station, NY 14, NY

My love, and the fullest sort of excitement, that FLEA is here!

Yr friend & companion,

OLSON

[added in script]
P.S. By the way, I think it the best READ I have seen! I only demur he confines you with CRYSTAL—& Joyce!

["P.S." added in script at top of letter]
P.S.: tell me in "B", on p. 114, 2nd para. what happens at "each regards the . . .", each of the IAMBS? or B & P? what, precisely, do you mean? And is the quote yrs? or can you give me its previous context? I should like very much to understand THIS!

[New York City]
August 4, 1950

Dearest Charles:

I have your two epistles from Zeus, and any thanks even from the deity of the heart cannot be nourished enough by mountain and river and tree roots. Take, then, My Friend, my Thanks, and though they must be poor and pithless and lazar-wormed, for I have no grace or goodness or some legend to meal you with at this instant, to put into Themis's Scales that has any weight in justice or in heaven to equal your LETTERS. Then, God be kind, and let not Charles be vexed, I am sending this to you in a hurry, or as you said to me in a letter delivered to you by sacred Theuth, many years ago, I must *mercury* this to you. This is not at all an answer, but just the bow of the eyelids closed of dust. Let it be, just for the moment, and with your pardon and mercy upon me, for I shall soon write you. I do not wait, Charles, to answer you as the gods would reply, or even as the meager footprint of Vulcan, for it is said also that he is the Father of all mankind,

is some dim tracery in sand or earth or in pebble, of the first brazier. But I should be more ashamed not to reply now, though it be the niggard word of a caitiff than to wait, having you in the meanwhile, regard me as something even worse in the morbose bottoms of the earth. I am asking you please to forgive me, for though I love your two LETTERS, I cannot just for a depraved moment study them, as I wish to, and send you again the homage and maybe even a dim perception, borne to me from Hermes or even some oracle pouched in the wings of Attica's OWL'd Athene.

'Only he who is alone can be wise without being double.' which you care for, and the gratitude of the angels to you for so caring, is, I blush to say, mine; I was not borrowing from Pindar or Hesiod or furtively inclining my ear over the tripod. I was simply considering you, Bellerophon, and what you are so tempted by the AEOLIAN WINDS, or the ALEIAN PLAINS, which is, as the scholiasts say, which one? Charles? Apollodorus, perhaps the lute-headed Pindar, is new found land. Jane Harrison too has some matter on Bellerophon, but you know it, I am sure, and then there is the lost fragment from Euripides. What I was attempting to write was that each man, having you and me in mind, me and you, regards his joven wisdom, which is really the raging iambic hoofbeat in his distempered, and dionysiac soul (for it was Archilochus's Rage that made his Iambic). as something other than that kind of priapic or heart-fit, we are always mistaking the ugly cucumber head of the garden variety of phallus for the soul anyway, for Mount Horeb. But I am not writing at all what I want to, and I shall, if you please, return to this, when I have reread the letters.

So far, Charles, I have received four copies, one went to you and Constanza, a very frugal kind of singleness I own I made out of this, but I shall make amends to her, and one I gave to RLene, lately returned from nice and firenze, and so the Cana waterpots are filled with the wine again, and of course, I phoned her at once to tell her your feeling about the Parables, and I do hope Lady Constanza

believes as you do. Of course, you were as much of an augur as Calchas in one of your fine, ear-quickened moods, for when one reads or writes one should listen to the stream on the bed-rock, or to the hamadryad in the tree, or to some deep ravined earth-root which has so many miracles in it, which we do not know if our ear is not mythologic. Deukalion heard the Flood, and Charon oars the desolate boat to Styx, for the voices of the dead are infinitely more doleful than their aspect or visage. To have you or Constanza buy copies would be to send me to some merchant's Tartarus; I could not endure such ignominy from hostile Esaus, how then could I bear the wound, much more piercing and blood-pronging from one's friends, for who can hurt like a friend, or a lover, and how blunt is Galba's butchery, or Domitian's bodkin, or Caesar's assassins!

I shall send copies soon as I can for Constanza, and one to Cernovich, and to the names listed. If you do not do then the critique, what asps, toads, moles, osprey kites, infected bats, taxidermist pards and hollywood lions am I a prey to.

I send again the thanks of a miserable wight, a gnat, a flea, and say to you no less in lamentation for my inadequacies what David wept in the presence of tall, august Saul; he had rare majesties, he who sat beneath the tamarisk, although in some scholia it is said the tamarisk is not tall enough so to umbrella him, and maybe the tamarisk is much of a pauper as the terebinth which abraham took for his canopy for the Angels at Mamre, and is an almshouse and bewighted ash, or a balkan or levantine bush, just as the burning Tree was no more, perhaps than a little sumach, the desert tamarisk at Gibeah is no less than the temple at Ammon, and as for the terebinth, i take it more quickly to my bosom than the Oaks of Dodona.

My deep, deep apologies, Charles, and Constanza, and soon, I pray to the hills, and shall go to Ur, to Baal-Peor, to write you some words not so uncivil as these. After your letters I do not dare ask you to forgive me. You send Pauline Messages to the Corinthians and the

Ephesians and the Romans, and all these three damned, banal, Christless [churches?] return salutations. O the dryness, the devout vascular idiocy and baboonish head-grimace of man, I am now speaking in particular of edward dahlberg of kerioth, forgive him, O Giant of the Word, and in the name of our Mythic Friendship and Love, please, now, do not send Epistles to the Churches of Gaza, Gath and Ashkelon, and I bend my brass-neck, and unhinge my proud, stubborn, fatuous knee, do not now in Giant Wrath Mercury an Epistle to the Laodiceans!

You have, my love, my total friendship, and my FAITH, grounded as it is in this letter from homunculus dahlberg, and please tell your sweet Constance that she shall have her 3 copies soon as I can get copies. I spit upon myself, and drink the gall and the hyssop, and this I do in monkish haircloth. if you wish to bash me the more, really humble me, and cast me a helpless, hapless, hirsute beggar among the nettles of aristophanes and adam, and the potsherds of job, write me, then, another magnificent letter, and so shame me as no man has been disgraced since the first sin. were i whitman i should throat it out, i cannot suffer enough for the venerealee, but i already see you in leviathan strength roaring, who's venereal, may not you, blessed virgin mary charles, or were i edward dahlberg i should roar out a mighty noise through a molehill, what is the difference betwixt an evil-doer and a hypocrite, and let the fool answer, i mean me, not you, MAN.

Your very fond and loving friend,
EDWARD

[hand-written note] [Washington, D.C.]
Monday

Ed—

a slight hold-up i don't see how i can get out of here, to

Worcester, & to ny by tomorrow

we better plan it for *wednesday* afternoon if by any chance i can get there tuesday you will have heard from me by 3 but all signs say *wednesday*, around 2

Christopher Smart is beautiful and it was a beautiful evening, turning on the Wheel of Sheol

[Washington, D.C.]
sunday august 6 1950

you may cry "sheep", edward, but your three pages of protest are of such charm and beauty, wilyness; and disclose so much of mythologem and so little of perturbation, that I am led along, Constanza and I have been led along, this whole Mediterranean day;

though I should immediately say, to be honest with you, that the picture your letter gives of you Zeus-Zeusing down the street (to be pronounced sashaying down Morton street) struck us both as being not at all slack, as you would have us believe, so much as indolent, as though you had risen, or been pushed out of, like Zeus, some lady's bed.

As a matter of fact, my friend it did not need your subtle commentary (to Bellerophon, back, shall we call it) on the tamarisk tree to see your whole letter as something lying out at ease under a tamarind or whatever tree it was Abraham chose to shade the Angels at Mamre by

In fact it is the loveliest sort of proof of what you pray for, this letter—and that, despite the knots it gets its syntax in—the very sort of knots one can imagine Zeus did find himself in, whether he had just been a shower, a bull or a cloud!

So we send back, I reject, your Nilus' tears, protest, in turn, you need not, when you float so idly, think you are, or try to snare us into thinking you are, homunculus,

or so caitiff as you cry you are, my flesh-fattened and replenishing "liar", my Proteus who has just lain down, this noon, with his herds, on some Manhattan beach. The truth is, my truth-dissembler, your pleasure pleasures us—or what are these sides of many-sided myths good for, my allusionary?

But I also tell you, Edward Dahlberg of Hazor, Hadattah or of Kerioth, that though you propose, in answer to my simplest question of where Constanza might possess herself of three copies, for three transgressions of this man of Kerioth, and for four, she will manage, thus to thank him for his money-folly, this edward dahlberg, who so Jove-like offers his generosities, in this amplitude of August mood and noon. I shall punish him, I shall, I now decree, by not doing, then, this sharp critique, leaving him, for his too-rich and substantive acts, his David largeness, a plague to the very catalogue of terrors he is hosted by, by asps, toads, ospreys, infected bats, 3rd Avenue leopards and White Spot lions out of that Gaza on which people gaze.

Or shall I suspend my double-axe & sign of anger until he has another chance to write, when he is less melon-like and delta'd and can so use his intellect, of which he once was as full of as Hebron was of vales, that such barbarisms as mercuried some wild ignorant savage has poisoned the wells of his language with, or such neologisms as he himself has invented to umbrella him, are set aside And he is able, all by himself, single you might say, not mixed and doubleted or hose down-gived, to make clear what he means about cucumbers, or diseases?

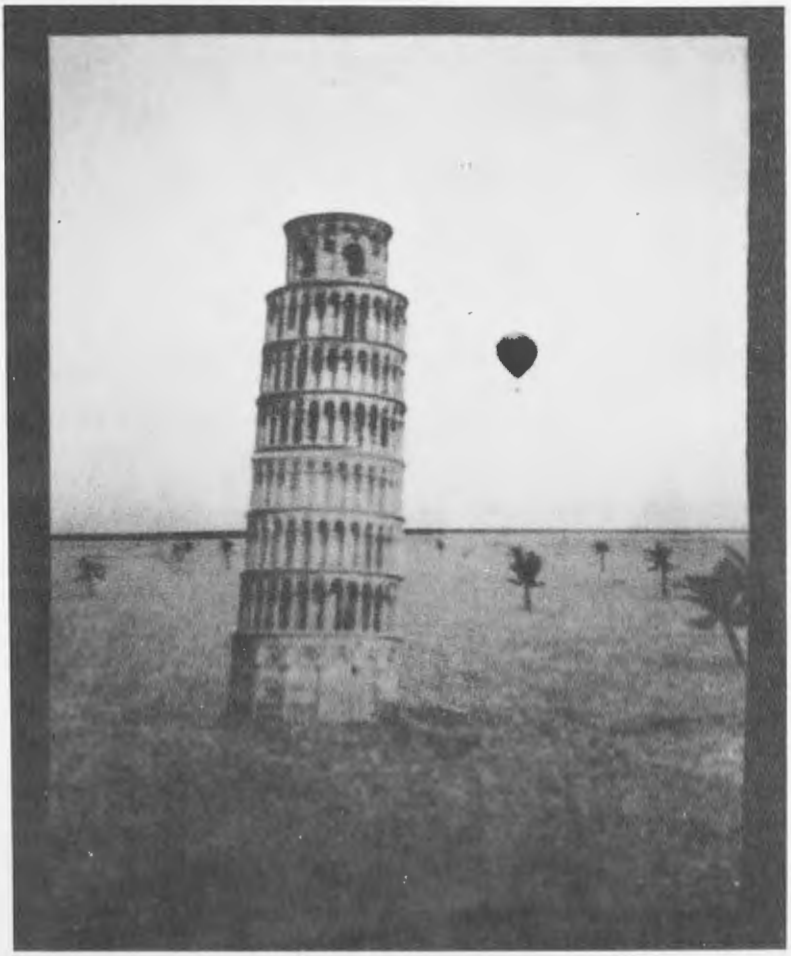
I shall.

With double love,
C — OLSON

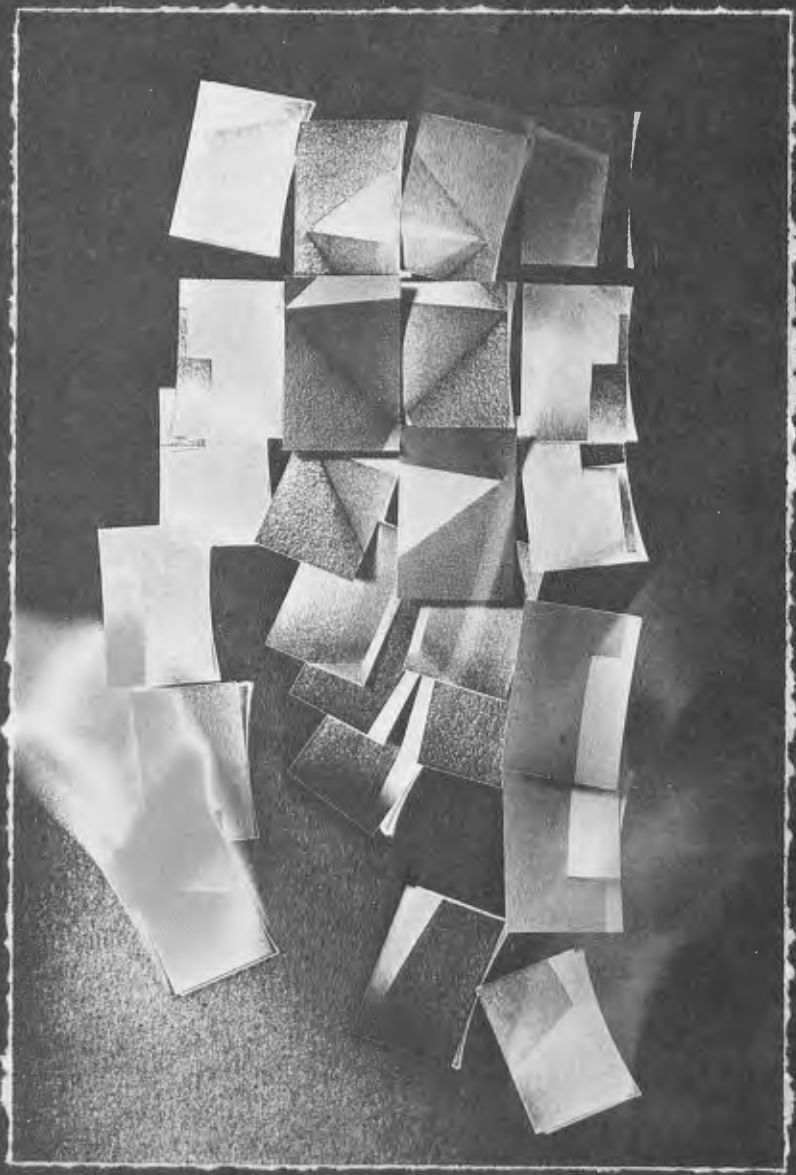
△

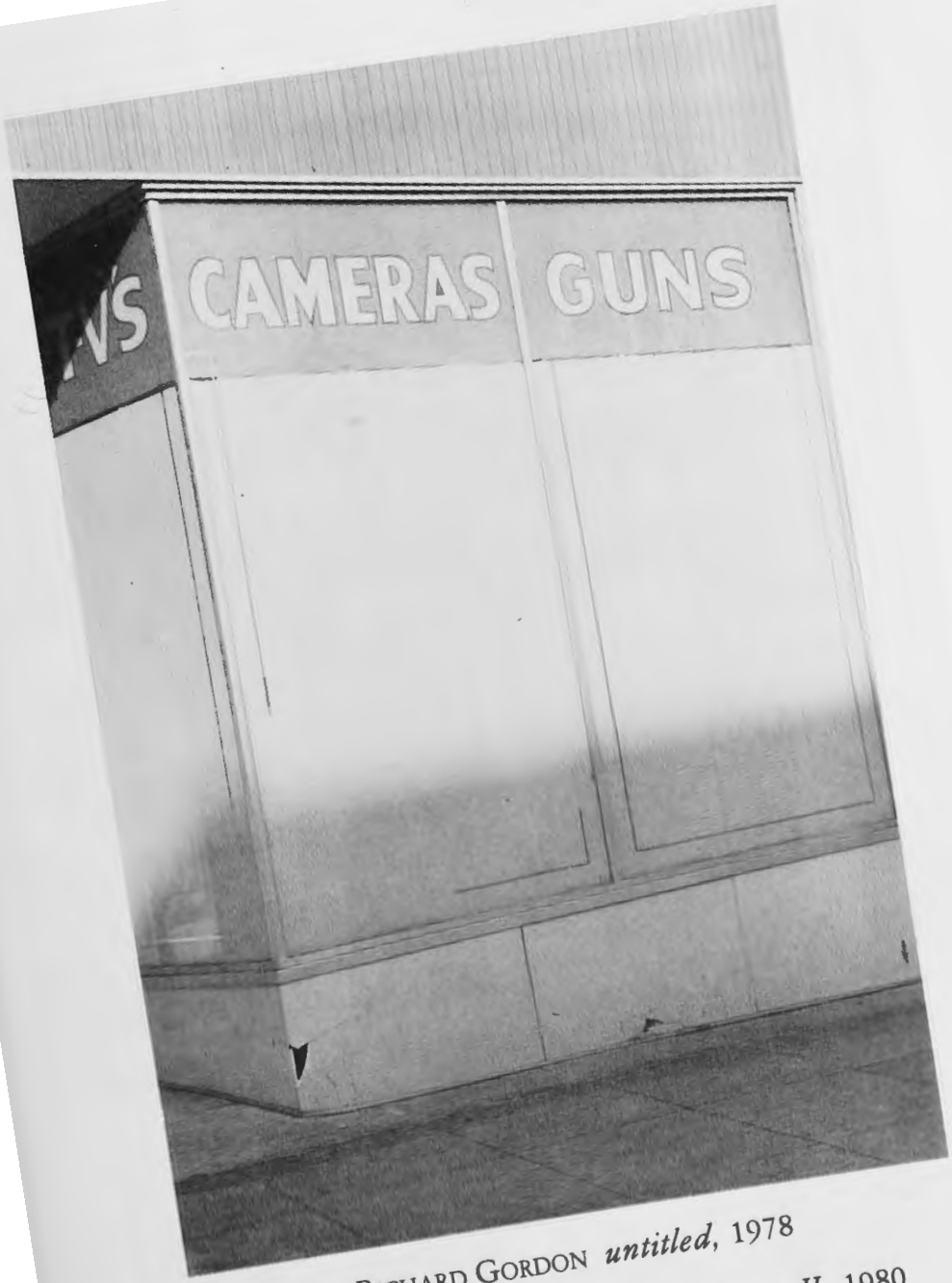
SIX PHOTOGRAPHERS

selected by Darryl J. Curran



RUTH THORNE-THOMSEN pinhole photograph from *Expeditions*, 1979





RICHARD GORDON *untitled*, 1978

CHUCK NICHOLSON from *Corners Series II*, 1980

WAYNE R. LAZORIK *untitled*, 1979

JOE JACHNA *Rte. 41, Wisconsin,* 1971

DIANA SCHOENFELD
Rhythmic Arrangement: Leaf with Stamen, 1980 ⟶

Jerome Rothenberg

Terror

• • • • • • •
dream of the jews
has ended something else
waits in its place
a gunman maybe
standing at your door
who watches
in back of his blood
the horse's eye
run through his mind
"a wolf" the killer
calls himself
offers his body, shyly
to the fathers
wakes at dawn, his eye
bigger than the moon
shines for him
& leads him down the hall
—hellos, exchange of dishes
fantasies of home—
the mouth of the fanatic
trembles stutters
he is in love with his first dream
the taste of honey
cloth against fingertips
the traditions of their people
motors secret hideouts
his mother even now
whispers to his dark side

the letters of the universe
exploding lights
signal him on
he will address the bride
again a lesson of his courage
he will give her
satisfaction
night & day
he circles around her
like a watchdog
prowling prowling
beside her father's stall
the gunman
speaks to his own shadow
on the hill
—depletion—
—death—
over the hill a camel
walks, stupidly
into the camera
stop him!
even if for a moment
cries the gunman's mouth
the teeth of the fanatic
biting staining the pale roots
the mask of antiochus
finds a jewish face
looks back at us
in righteousness
in anger at his own flesh
what can we give
but whispers
to make the rain appear?
the rain won't,
will it?
the daughter returns to the hut,
party ended,

bodies propped on bare beds
the fanatic's kin
his victims
tunnels exploded through their hearts
fly past him
foam pours from his mouth
his lungs fill up with foam
the wounded deer flies past
& calls him
like his vanished thumbs
another landscape
opens
with his boot he presses
legs & back
moving the flesh aside
& probes—aloof—the thin line
where the legs meet
grown thick with hair
how tight the dreamer's hand
becomes how close
to prayer
his angry copulations
the mind of the fanatic
fills with glass the fish
swim in the broken auto
furniture & rags
ignited
clog the hallways
processions of pale jews
are arabs now
the gunman, dark fanatic
gentile become jew
jew gentile
bellows in broken hebrew
in accents of his childhood
southern towns
assassins & vigilantes

even his mother can't believe
the coming struggle
treasons against god
repelled
forever the killer
born to kill
escapes from the viet nam tunnel
in the street of little jewelers
semites of his mind
he rides a hairy motor bike
(the friend says)
gun slung over chest
into a world of strangers
caftaned killers
heavy with arab names
who wait for him
will stage the final shootout
the clock is moving
towards its end
explosions at the father's grave
the decade is a thrill for them
a new encounter
bigger than the last
the blood is such a clock
& such a clock
is always throbbing
in the blood
& in the morning sky

On May 2, 1980, Palestinian gunmen ambushed a group of Israeli settlers on the occupied West Bank. Among the six Israelis killed was Eli Hazeez (the last name means "the wolf"), born James Eli Mahon, Jr. in Alexandria, Virginia. An American Protestant by birth, he came out of Viet Nam & American ultraconservatism into Israeli citizenship & conversion through the rightwing Kach Movement led by Meir Kahane. During his stay in Israel, the *N.Y. Times* reported, "he was jailed for 8 months for breaking into Arab houses in Hebron, smashing furniture, beating residents, and shouting at them to get out of 'Jewish houses.'" Of those who died in the ambush, "he alone was buried defiantly in the Jewish Cemetery of occupied Arab Hebron."

Garth Tschernisch

More Praise From The Barnyard Suite No. 2

hello sill brother's raucous digging glass out of renée's
heel she screams up above the piece of roof an ordinary
spitting and of blood an oblong feel now she screams

or simpler yet hello lots of serious folks out for christmas
cheer a memory brother's raucous digging glass out
of renée's heel or simpler yet the grave male sometimes
grave and more attune and more

up above the piece of roof the first rash of weather busy
with us now she screams the ceiling tapped or simpler yet
the ceiling none such movie tapped an ordinary spitting
and of blood busy with us cold first rash of weather busy
with us

slow come now to slow brother's raucous digging glass
not bad now she screams hello lots of serious folks out
for christmas cheer hello

an oblong feel now a little first paul among others
laughing slow come now to slow

or simpler yet attune now to slow none such movie since
and more

not bad a memory up above the piece of roof an oblong feel or simpler yet the first rash of weather now she screams the first rash a little now she screams and more

ordinary spitting since she screams and then the ceiling none such movie rap and jargon tapped well a little first paul brother's raucous digging glass likely now and then an oblong feel

now slow come now to slow the first rash of weather busy with us none such chainsaw movie rap and jargon busy with us jotting up above the piece of roof now she screams attune and

and of blood blood and then the first rash of weather and of blood the ceiling tapped a little first since hello

or simpler yet I'm stiffer now since slow come now to slow an ordinary spitting and of blood hello she screams first among others and of blood she screams

I'm stiffer old arm's acting up above the piece of roof since sometimes grave a little first grave and more

now she screams a little slow come now to slow brother's raucous digging busy with us jotting first rash of weather cold of likely seated jotting memoranda brother's raucous digging glass out of renée's heel she screams since cheer attune she screams lots of memoranda now since sometimes brother's raucous digging grave male grave and more attune she screams

or then let fly the business with us halted cars and
fenders take a breather digging glass out of renée's heel
not bad since a little first hello I'm stiffer still brother's
raucous digging first among others busy with us

up above the piece of roof seated likely now I'm stiffer
jotting memoranda ordinary spitting and of blood cold
runs the lengthy shin seated first among others laughing
then the ceiling tapped a little first hello she screams

jotting first old man's acting up jotting runs the lengthy
shin slow come now to slow I'm stiffer jotting since
jotting memoranda since

or then let fly up above the piece of roof more grave male
grave sometimes first hello first rash of weather since
she screams a memory or simpler yet hello

sill brother's raucous digging glass out of renée's heel

not bad a memory now a little first hello she screams let
fly the business with us halted cars and fenders take a
breather cold since digging glass and fenders take a
breather

or simpler yet cold the drive-in movie rap consoles up
above the piece of roof and more I'm stiffer jotting up
above the piece of roof first rash since a little first

Δ

Hayden Carruth

Who I Am

CROWS MARK, 11 JUNE 81: A couple of months ago Allen Ginsberg and I were talking about quantitative meter, by no means a dull topic. Allen has become interested in the idea of quantity as a metrical aid, both for writing and for reading; he read me poems by Campion, Wyatt, and others who have professed to imitate classical quantitative measure in English, and he showed me how the Sapphic measure, which he especially admires, had helped him to straighten out a troublesome passage in his new "Plutonian" poem. Finally he read the famous lines from Canto LXXXI:

> The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.
> Pull down thy vanity, it is not man
> Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
> Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down. . . .

giving them their natural accents, heavily stressed to show how they fall into an irregular order, possibly into quantitative measure. "At least," he said, "that's one way to understand it."

Allen's enthusiasm was unmistakable. I wish I could quote more of what he said. My memory isn't good enough. But I think I am not

misrepresenting him if I say that his enthusiasm was impelled by a strongly felt need for a firmer concept of measure than he had had when he wrote, "by instinct," his earlier poems, "Howl," "Kaddish," and the rest. And I know I am not misrepresenting the many other poets of Allen's age and mine, or some younger ones as well, when I say that they have expressed to me during the past two or three years this same need for some renewed concept of measure in their own writing.

As far as I could hear, in his reading of the various "quantitative" poems in English Allen used nothing but an ordinary American stress accent. In the lines by Pound, for instance, Allen's quantitative reading did not alter my hearing of the iambic pentameter (with permissible variations) that I believe Pound was using in conscious imitation of English 17-century poetry. Myself, I don't believe quantity can work, or ever has worked, in English. How can it when we pronounce *father, gather,* and *bather* with exactly the same stress/unstress, in spite of the considerable changes in the "length" of the accented vowel? The same with *booter, butter, boater, baiter, beater, bitter,* etc. The Sapphic measure is a mixture of trochees and dactyls in a four-line stanza, of which the first three lines are metrically the same and the fourth is abbreviated. It is an Aeolic measure, one of the "lyric" forms, and it worked marvelously in Greek because the language kept a genuine distinction of quantity between long and short vowels and an accent based partly on pitch (as more conspicuously in Chinese and Sanskrit). But in the modern European languages we have neither pitch (though we don't speak in a monotone, as some have asserted, and anyone who has lived in France will have observed the extraordinary changes of pitch with which a Frenchwoman can say *Ooh la la* without breaking from a spoken to a singing voice) nor length; we have stress. We have almost infinite degrees of stress. Contemporary phoneticians, using computers, can show that no two syllables in any English sentence are accented alike. They can show that no two readers of a given line of poetry accent it

alike. This is the reason, or one of many reasons, why the imposition of "classical" scansion, with its iambs, trochees, anapests, etc., on English poetry can never work except very inexactly, as prosodists have been saying for generations. Nevertheless our stress accents do create rhythm; and rhythm by its own nature falls into repetitive patterns, or what we call measure.

Even Latin poets writing in imitation of Greek meters, as did all literary Romans for hundreds of years (though not the folk poets), found their own language unamenable, the accent of stress working against (and eventually supplanting) the accent of length or pitch, so that Horace's Sapphics, for instance, can be read either quantitatively or accentually, with very different but equally "legitimate" effects in either case. (See W. Beare, *Latin Verse and European Song*, 1957, p. 171 *et passim*.)

In the early 1950s I reviewed two or three books of *Paterson* as they appeared; the reviews were in the *Nation*. In one of them I asked what principle of metric made the poetry so readable. I couldn't extrapolate any measure from the poetry that would hold up consistently as a poetic construct. (Williams, incidentally, wrote me a long, cordial letter, in which it became clear that he couldn't extrapolate one either.) Twenty years later, in 1973, when I was preparing a selection of my prose for the press, I added a note to this review, but the note was later scratched in order to save space. (The book, *Working Papers*, will finally be published next year.) I have always regretted the loss of that note, however, so I quote it, somewhat shortened, here:

"These questions about line values in Williams' verse (which I put so long ago) were taken up in succeeding years by many people, but chiefly by Williams himself and by Charles Olson. The idea of the 'variable foot,' which Williams came to while writing his late poems, was no doubt a clarification of his own metrical instinct, helpful to him in the composition of those superb poems; yet I believe the idea remained for him a sensed thing, nearer to instinct than to precept. A

very personal idea, at any rate. And in 'Asphodel' and the other poems of his last period, although my ear does detect a firmer line than in some of the earlier work, I still find passages in which the line structure breaks down, passages I cannot read aloud without either losing the line structure or breaking into elocutionary awkwardness in order to preserve it. As for Olson's hypothesis that the line is a unit of breath, this is helpful because it brings prosody back to its sensory base and because we can all confirm it in what we know of our physiology and psychology. Yet in the end I think it has more to do with tone, mood, speed, or style in a poem—with *texture*—than with measure as such.

"Measure is the word to hang onto, and in all its senses. It means not only the way we recognize cadence in a poem, but the way we make relative judgments of space and time; it implies regularity. Inches and feet, minutes and hours. Without them there is no measure. In poetry there is no measure if the reader or auditor cannot anticipate, by inference from the regularity of the beats that have already struck his senses, the striking of *the next beat.* This does not mean iambic pentameter. It does mean, however, that free verse is a literal contradiction, an impossibility; poetry, if it is really poetry, cannot be entirely irregular.

"But there is nothing to say that the measure is *verbal*, or that the beat is tied to syllables. Iambic pentameter is not only regular, it is inflexible; the beat is tied to the iambs, that is, to a particular order of syllables. But we need flexibility in our verse as much as we need regularity; we need to be able to anticipate the next beat and to recognize the line structure by which measure is sustained, but we need also to have naturalness of phrasing and freedom of syntax.

"I always revert to Pound, and to his early suggestion that poets 'compose in the sequence of the musical phrase.' How simple. How brilliant. Which perhaps explains why no one has successfully elaborated it, as far as I know. It is a pity, because it means that Pound's statement (more exactly, his restatement of an ancient prin-

ciple) has turned into a catch-phrase—people speak it and repeat it without bothering to ask what it means. To most it conveys merely a license to compose any way they want—feelingly, *liltingly*, that's the commonest meaning. But Pound was a fair musician; he knew what he was talking about when he spoke of 'the sequence of the musical phrase.' A measure in music, a bar, is a fixed quantity. If the time signature is 4/4, you have four beats to the measure—'and no cheatin',' as Bill Basie used to say. But within the fixed measure you may have any phrasal combination you wish, any distribution of accents, any number and variety of notes; you may emphasize the beat or you may syncopate it; you may play around it; you may even substitute rests. Indeed, Basie and thousands of other fine musicians have made jazz improvisations that contain rhythmic variations so subtle and intricate that they can be notated only with an oscillograph, yet they always add up to four beats in the measure. Hence there is no question of tying the beat to an inflexible pattern of accentual or phrasal units, such as an endless succession of eighth notes. Yet the measure is preserved. Even in complex music, if one has a trained ear one can hear it.

"When English prosodists tied the beat to an inflexible syllabic pattern, they created a poetry as confining and awkward as music would be if it were limited entirely to eighth notes. Fortunately the tonal and textural resources of language, in both sound and meaning and in the two interacting, are far greater than the resources of unarticulated sound, i.e. music; and this accounts for our rich poetry in traditional meters. (And Bach was no slouch with eighth notes, for that matter!) The poets could stick to the syllabic ding-dong and still get extraordinary variety of stresses into their sentences. (See Pope's late epistles for an extreme example.) But without doubt much of the best poetry of our century, especially in America, has been composed according to notions of free metric. Pound was the master. He kept the measure, he kept alive our anticipation of the beat, he was always aware of line values, very keenly aware; yet by us-

ing every device of phrasing, including rests and stops, he also kept alive our sense of the spontaneity and natural harmony of poetic language, never forced, never imprecise. His influence is pervasive. It seems to me that the three closest followers of Charles Olson—Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan—come nearer to Pound in the metrical practices I have just described than they do to Olson or to Williams himself.

"There are other quantities, of course, besides the beat, hearable quantities that can be used to establish measure and arouse our anticipation of line length: the accent and alliteration of Anglo-Saxon verse; the syntactical parallelism of Hebrew poetry, especially as it entered English through the Psalter and set off a secondary strain of metrical feeling—Milton, Blake, Whitman, etc. Pound himself was not unaffected by these influences, as we can tell from the surprisingly liturgical chant he used in reciting his own poems. Perhaps it is impossible to track down and methodize all the sources of a poet's metrical practice; perhaps it is unimportant to do so. The point is to write, not to theorize. Yet we were given minds and our minds do nag us, just as Williams was nagged by his until at last he came to the idea of the variable foot; which, whatever good it may be to the rest of us, was an immense good to him."

To this I would add, as of 1981, only points of emphasis:

1. The beat is important, in both poetry and music, not because the sounded phrasing is tied to it but because it isn't.

2. No rhythm that does not set up an anticipation of the beat to come is properly rhythmic at all.

3. Any concept of measure, whether vocal or syntactical, even typographical, even pseudo-quantitative or purely syllabic, any concept at all that helps a particular poet to get on with his writing is a good one. What works, works.

4. Different ways of reading, based on different concepts of measure, may be applied to the same poetry with no loss of rhythmic effect or understanding; often the different systems of accentuation

will coincide.

5. Not long ago when I was reading Whitman with some graduate students, we all agreed that we were too inhibited vocally to chant the poems as Whitman himself doubtless did. Our grandparents and great-grandparents were taught to ready poetry *as* poetry. No doubt many excesses were committed—gestures, declamatory extravagance, etc.—but why did we throw out the baby with the bathwater? Now we are afraid to read even our own finicky poems for the vocal acuities they might possibly contain. Our voices are atrophied, no tension in them, no resonance or timbre.

6. Today in this country our best poets, whom I would probably number between fifty and a hundred, are being swept away and drowned in the flood of soft, imitative, academic writing of thousands upon thousands of mediocre poets. (By "academic," I mean belonging to any of our "schools" of ideopoetry. Where is an independent poet now? I haven't heard of any.) One reason for the mediocrity, one among others, is the loss of a sense of measure. This is not enough to create a poetic revolution. Many historical, cultural, and probably political and social elements must coalesce, as they did in 1790 or 1910. Of course I do not know when that will happen again. I see a chance of it in my lifetime, but only a very small chance. What I do know is that I am fed up. And I am not alone.

Here is one of my favorites, by an unknown poet a generation or two before Chaucer:

Lollai, lollai, litil child
    Whi wepistou so sore?
Nedis mostou wepe
    Hit was iyarkid the yore

Ever to lib in sorrow,
    And sich and mourne evere,
As thin eldren did er this,
    Whil hi alives were.

Lollai, lollai, litil child,
Child, lollai, lullow!
Into uncuth world
Icommen so ertow.

Is this remarkable prosodic sophistication an anomaly? No. Read the praise songs of Numidia, the prayers of the Eskimos. The important elements of human sensibility haven't changed much, nor are they likely to—if we can hang onto our five wits. Is this metrical spirit old or new? As spirit—or intention, affectivity, whatever you will—it is neither. The poem's rhythmic feeling is as permanent as its thematic feeling; it is contemporary with Sappho and Williams. This power of poetic language to move in almost infinitely complex variations over the predictable beat—even when the language prolongs or cuts short the beat—is what permits us to recognize poetry and respond to it, anywhere and at any time.

△

Dennis Phillips

from: Two Cross

Sleep. What's?
Protrusion? Intrusion?

A tailor dresses to dance. Ah! Now.
Tailor tincture: Liquid to invoke the tot. tot. tot. Sleep?
What is? it.

Total of what's used.
Praying Mantis.
Sectional. Witches' Sabbath. In
Other
Words
A trait. A convention.

I promised you that the leader would be worthy, that the journey would be crucial. I promised this to you we speak
in concert in congress. In void. Inside the Valley of Id. Invalid.

That even more vectors. (Is that where we are.)

I promised you to be a guide or at least a comfort.

Now there are no guides. Nor comforts.
You looked at me with the unsure sadism of the officious.
This was a gesture of your protection but
I was not dissuaded.

We were to accompany eachother. Taste me.

I promised you. Chimes ignite. Total sum of your
look at me.

You looked at me as a worker, and I
was discomforted to be relegated.
You were protected by your position as servant.
You tasted me but hid your desire behind duty.
Responsibility.
And we traded the wry smile that knew
of the gravity of your duty: That it was only
the vestment, only the casing that seemed important
but that you were a servant.

I promised you. You looked at me. It
said: Don't. Forsake. Us.

"Efficacious" kept coming into it. We
couldn't recall its exact meaning. But it kept
showing up in
voice
sottovoce.

A language. Of where we
were then but really where we must be now:
no exact denote.

"You
are efficacious"

"Fine. But what does *that* mean?"

We came to eachother. Alchemy discovered in the industry of foods,
now becomes useful. Your arms become the world.
And now we see that the world is a platform, a point
of departure. A point. A place in a continuum.
A point: of departure. Of view. Of taste. Of promise.
Of looking.

You told me of the simplest. But that was what we thought.
Now we see.
Only a platform. Not the simplest.

It would be (not the simplest)
your face lit gently in the tensor theory but
in the tensor light. Your face a promise your regard a
promise.

△

Antonin Artaud

Letter to Jean Paulhan

—translated by Norman Glass

Paris, 4 February 1937

Dear friend,

The physical recollections that assailed me when I reached the very heart of the Tarahumara mountain were so persistent that I came to consider them as distinctly personal memories. Everything: the life of the earth and of the grass, below, the indentations of the mountain, the peculiar shapes of the rocks, and above all the dusty echelons of light amidst the endless perspectives of the superimposed summits, always further away, miraculously receding, everything I saw came to represent an experience I had lived, an experience which had already passed through me, and not the discovery of a strange but new world. All that was not new. But the feeling of *déjà vu* is vague, I mean *dateless*, while I, in fact, perfectly recalled the origins of my feeling; for this lived organic experience made me remember another to which I felt linked, indirectly perhaps, but by material threads nevertheless. These were historical recollections which arose, rock by rock, blade of grass by blade of grass, horizon by horizon. I did not invent the apparition of the Magi Kings; it was forced upon me *in precise details* by a country constructed like the countries in paintings, which certainly do not come from nothing. I do not believe in an absolutely independent imagination, I mean one that makes something from nothing, no mental image which does not strike me as the separated limb of an image which is effected and lived

somewhere. And in their turn these huge, uninhabited images evoked other images which had once been populated, and their life seemed to be displayed indeed on an unusual plane; it was not I who invented the tradition of the magic signs, and that this mountain was beset by them is a fact; I gave you a brief list of them in one of the articles I sent you, but stone by stone, all considered, I had the impression at the end of my journey that I had noted all of them: from the / which is divided into a //, broken in the middle by a stroke ⊢, opposite which is this same straight stroke which has come out of it Ⓗ; and I cannot help it if this H shape which appears to be the result of those strokes is the principal figure on which so Plato tells us the Atlantans built their cities, it may sound puerile but it exists on the Tarahumara mountain and in Plato. I saw a rock streaked with three vertical stokes, 3, and on this rock a smaller one streaked by a single stroke; I saw the enormous phallic tooth which I have already spoken to you about with 3 stones on the top and 4 holes on the front; I saw in a holed rock a man's round head which perfectly houses the disk of the sun at sunrise, and underneath, the man's body extended *in shadows* with his right arm stretched out like a stroke of light, and his left arm like the same stroke, but *in shadows too*, and folded up; I saw the figure of death almost *extirpated* from the surrounding rocks, and it held in its quite enormous left hand a young child; and I do not mention all the images and all the resemblances I saw, and which indicated a forgotten fauna of nature. The latter appeared to recall millenary myths in which *tamed* man communes with the Powers that have broken him in; and if the universal world of the Jews is represented by two interpenetrating triangles, the world of all the Races whose descent is red is illustrated by two triangles facing each other and joined by the ideal line of a tree; this world I saw it a hundred times on the rocks, emerged from an indescribably amazing accident of nature; on the trees, where it was stamped by the very hands of men; and everywhere I kept on finding this famous ⊢/, the H of procreation in short; I often saw it on trees that had been

deliberately burnt from top to bottom so that its shape would be clearly revealed, and it sprang out of the trees, was almost *extracted* from them; I saw the figure of a man and woman, they faced each other, and the man's prick was erect; how many times moreover did I come upon the small world of the earth represented by a circle, with another much wider circle around it for the undetermined Universe; how many times did I come upon the cross of the Rosicrucian tradition: 4 triangles orientated towards the 4 cardinal points and centred, all around one point; I saw this sign! What can I do if it conforms with the one of the Rosicrucian tradition, if that is how the Rosicrucians did in fact form their crosses; and this symbol was repeated thousands of times, not only in the middle of Nature, but on the doors of houses made with a single plank, also on the walls, in the shade of the roofs; I saw houses whose façades matched each other in squares and in points, and sometimes in sorts of rectangles, one above the other they appeared to have been added up; and hadn't I been told on the mountain over there that these scattered geometrical figures were not scattered but *assembled* and that they constituted the signs of a language based on the very form of the breath when it is liberated in resonances; universal magic is not based on many more elementary signs than all those I came upon on the spot and in the quick on a mountain which, even if we exclude these signs, still possesses the light of haunted countries. Much less work was required of novelists, of poets who recovered and labelled myths invented merely by their imagination; in describing my journey I did not claim that I was writing a thesis for a doctorate, finding again the path of an infallible tradition, and supplying proof to corroborate it; after all, let people draw from these discoveries the conclusions that appeal to them, it doesn't matter; and it matters very little to me if I believe that in order to return home the Magi Kings made a detour through the uninhabited mountains of Mexico; but I know that when I reached those summits that overlooked almost endless miles of landscape I felt recollections and unusual images moving violently within

me, yet when I started on my journey nothing had led me to anticipate them. And seeing on these mountains that were encrusted with figures many more figures than there are divinities set into the high walls of certain Indian temples; seeing men with headbands pass by, men rolled up in cloaks which had embroidered triangles, and crosses, points, circles, tear-drops and flashes of lightning: and these crosses, these points, these circles, these rectangles, these tear-drops and these streaked flashes of lightning were not at all spangled decorative motifs arranged in a symmetry that would have weakened their impact, for never did I see 2 cloaks that bore the same signs, moreover the color of each cloak suited the hue of the *crude* faced man that wore it: seeing these men pass by, men who were apparently ignorant of the symbolism in which their life seemed to be bathed, I could not believe that all that represented a calculation or some kind of research that they had made, I could not believe that it was the result of conscious and intelligent premeditation; they did all that, they said, because their fathers used to do it, and going back from father to father where, I wondered, would I ever find the origin of these practices; the least impressionable brain would have wondered to where these vestiges could in fact be traced back and what more than human tradition in short was signified by their presence.

Are not both green and yellow the opposite colors of death; green for resurrection, yellow for decomposition, decay, and if coincidences mean something you will allow me to conclude this letter by drawing your attention to the following events.

I arrived at night-fall at one of those villages dominated by phalluses, those phalluses stamped with figures, which appear to have been planted by an accident of nature; someone, I don't know who, was whistling the tune of a Tarahumara dance, with 5 very sharp bars which suddenly tumble down a hundred octaves, so that a voice from the depths seems to be replying; a child approached us, quite alone, naked under his grey cloak and his face literally eaten by pus: a sort of greenish string in his forehead bone appeared to replace the

course of a vein; he greedily ate the food that was handed to him, though he always kept a respectful distance; I thought I had noticed on the front of his cloak a red triangle, its apex pointing straight up, and as he turned round I saw on the back of his cloak a tear-drop, a huge embroidered tear-drop which took up the whole length of the cloak; its point was at the top of the cloak and it came down in a hook towards the left; and I immediately shrugged my shoulders before the image that it evoked; indeed I made an effort to suppress my ever active imagination; nevertheless the image that presented itself to me at that moment I cannot say that I did not think about it; and this fancy I will tell you what it was at the risk of having you shrug your shoulders as I shrugged mine; I had thought of God's *FIAT LUX*, and of the form which Robert Fludd, in his Theater of Eternal Wisdom, attributes to the original movement of the creation; this tear-drop, this curved bladder it is thus that he represents the light which having issued from the void bends little by little and encircles the darkness which it is going to replace; the tear-drop all alone was nothing perhaps, but the red tear-drop, with the red triangle was an already quite singular comparison; after that several weeks passed by during which I reached the very heart of the mountains, I saw the scattered Peyote priests who grind for entire nights on their graters the mixture of the first elements; and I took the road back.

I passed again through the village with the phallus and at the stroke of noon I asked for refuge at a miserable house from which I saw an Indian coming out, despite the heat, it was torrid at that moment, he kept himself wrapped up in a large cloak. I had already seen strange cloaks across the whole mountain; but this one bore four white triangles, almost compressed and which took up all the length of the cloak; its borders were sown with a line of green crosses on one side, yellow on the other and composed of the 4 triangles I have already told you about; the Indian greeted us without saying a word, with a slow but intelligent smile; and already the woman hastened to welcome me. While she prepared the maize and the herbs I was

struck by the sight of a false tress which she wore fastened on her hair; through this tress was wound an alternatively green and yellow woollen thread the same color as the crosses; and she wore moreover a necklace of green beads, and from her ears hung yellow stones; inside the house children were fighting with shrill cries, and I saw a very young boy come out, his belly was enormous and his mouth was ringed by abscesses, and behind him another older boy whom I recognized as the child in the grey cloak embroidered with a triangle and a tear-drop; I saw nothing unusual inside the house unless it was a cross in the corner, its head was shaped like a lance-head and its arms like small clubs. Questioned the Indian observed a perfect silence.

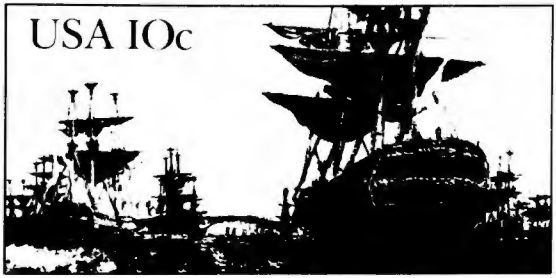
There you have it, dear friend, I wanted to tell you what I saw without drawing any kind of conclusion from it, you will perceive that the facts and the things speak for themselves, and no doubt more strongly than I have made them speak although no doubt with the same meaning. All these things encouraged me to dream that I was entering a special world, I will amuse myself perhaps one day by describing it, or I will describe it without amusing myself; I feel moreover that many present things would gain a great deal by entering this world. It is not from the point of view of the picturesque that I intend to prepare myself in order to describe this journey but from the point of view of effectiveness.

To you with all my heart.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

△

Michael Davidson



The Landing of Rochambeau

The Captain calls his crew to the deck
we are landing, he says
he doesn't know what to say next
so he adds, be back by noon me hearties
they don't believe him
this is not *Kidnapped*
and he would never use the word "hearties"
besides it is 1780, the harbor
is filled with sails
and the postmark covers some of them.

The Captain has gone below to pack
I have never landed before, he thinks,
what do I wear?
so he stands looking into the mirror
am I Rochambeau
or is this the name of my ship

or have we arrived at last in the Port
of Rochambeau whee we will strike a deal
with natives, then he remembers
it is 1780, the water is jade green.

The Captain is astonished to learn
that the Colonies have defeated the British
because of a "Stamp Tax," we have landed
too late, he mourns and looks out the window
to his right (our left), tall masts jut
into the Fragonard sky
against which USA 10¢ is branded forever,
he approves of the lettering and decides
not to go ashore after all
but writes a postcard home:

We have landed, the Captain writes
but not very well; it is 1780 and they are rowing
out to meet us; it is impossible to tell
whether we are rowing or they are rowing
or who they might be; many sails fill
the harbor and the postmark is rolling towards us
from Brooklyn on the left (my right),
please advise: this is history and I am
caught in it without a thing to wear
if only my name were Napoleon.

As it is, my life takes up
only seven lines in *The Reader's Encyclopedia*
where it is clear that Washington and I
defeated Cornwallis at Yorktown
and with the French Fleet (which must explain
those sails) forced "his" capitulation,

the entry leaves "his" a bit vague
in order to make the landing of Rochambeau
a surprise for both sides
including the reader's
who notices the pink sky of Watteau.

I am the Captain of this letter which begins
Dear Home, how I miss the Lisbon Earthquake
the Jansenist purges and leeks with egg,
remember Rochambeau in a foreign port
who must be content with corn and the inflated rhetoric
in pamphlets; I look up, he looks up
we regard him pausing mid-history
for a figure of speech like the ones he used to use
when writing Mme R. in Potsdam
like you are the author of my heart.

But it is 1780 and the Captain never writes postcards,
after all, he is a man of action
and he knows his fleet, the harbor
in which his ships lie at anchor,
he knows the sky, so common to USA
and the water, emerald blue
I'll go ashore, he says, throwing down his pen
and have a drink avec mon equipage
dans les petites boites du porte
I know at last what to wear.

For I am Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur
le Comte de Rochambeau and I have landed,
the water is blood red with history
and we are in its claws (he likes
the figure and writes it in his journal

then strides up to the deck
where the weather is clear)
"Lower the boats" he cries to a sailor,
"I will go ashore to The Bronx
where my name will be streets and parks."

But there is no sailor to hear him,
the deck is empty and the postmark
covers most of the fleet,
it has turned cold since Rochambeau landed
and when the French learn of what USA 10¢ means
they will cut off his title, Le Comte
no longer, only a name
in a time on a stamp on a card
for a reader who turns away from 1780
and remembers the water, white as their eyes.

△

Hart Crane to Kenneth Burke

Ten Unpublished Letters

Edited by R. Y. Zachary

Here we have a handful of letters written by Hart Crane at age 24 to 31, during the years when he was slowly evolving the poems that made up *The White Buildings* (1926) and *The Bridge* (1930). Kenneth Burke at this epoch was "secretary" to Scofield Thayer at *The Dial*, which is to say, master-of-all-work, contributing essays and translations, functioning as music critic—and confronting, at the desk opposite, Marianne Moore in her black *tricorne*. Burke was also experimenting with short fiction, which was gathered as *The White Oxen* (1924). Not surprisingly, Burke's omnivorous reading, his sharp and imaginative judgment of ideas, his wit and love of discussion, his total commitment to the life of a writer attracted Crane: "I am strong with you in admiration for Burke. I repeat for the eleventh time, I wish I could be in New York to talk to him. . . ." (Crane to Gorham Munson, 11.7.22.)

The message of these letters is largely implicit—signaled by the names of people, places, and events, merely mentioned or touched on in passing. Their connected significance can be seen only in the full accounts of Crane in such books as those by Philip Horton (1937), Brom Weber (1948), and John Unterecker (1969). But I am reminded here of one of Crane's most suggestive ideas about poetry: "It is as though a poem gave the reader as he left it a single new *word*, never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate." ("General Aims and Theories.") A poem, then, is the formula for an

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These letters were sent to me in November 1965 by Kenneth Burke for possible inclusion in a reissue of Hart Crane's selected letters, edited by Brom Weber. They arrived too late and are now published here by permission of Mr. Burke, with the concurrence of Professor Weber.

emotion—an idea akin to T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative"; but that a poem is a single word and a new one is a compelling way of putting it. This little sheaf of letters—unstudied as they are—seems to me to give us in a word, in the way a poem might, the essence of a poet's life: friends, music, drink, flight, reflection, love; adventuring after beauty in the Carib Isles, and meeting the hurricane before which there is nothing "But's smithereened apart"; *bridging*—"pontificating," as Burke calls it—trying to connect,

> ". . . and never to quite understand!" No,
> In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed
> Nothing so flagless as this piracy.

Saturday [Summer, 1923]

Dear Kenn:

I seem to be doing my best to add to your responsibilities while in the Dial office but this will be my last I'm sure. I haven't heard yet whether or not Rychtarik got his check for 25 for the picture Watson bought, but if you'll look into it there may be some saving of confusion all around later on.

a bientot
HART

The Munsons are in for hell. Poor Liza told me last night that their apartment has been leased over their heads, and that they will have to find a new place and be moved into within a week. That means a hard, at least strenuous, time for Gorham when he comes back next Wednesday. This city *is* hell!

Rychtarik: Richard Rychtarik, a Czech painter, and his wife Charlotte, a musician, settled in Cleveland and became intimate friends of Crane. Always a generous propagandist for artists he admired, Crane acted as middleman in the sale of one of Rychtarik's paintings to Dr. W. Sibley Watson, one of the sponsors of *The Dial.*

the Munsons: Gorham B. Munson, founding editor of the magazine *Secession* and long a key figure in New York literary life, met Crane early in 1919. He and Crane were contributors to *The Pagan* and met regularly in the Village bookshop of Joseph Kling, the publisher of that magazine. Gorham and his wife Liza, a dancer, were close to Crane throughout his life.

Woodstock, N.Y.
Nov. 16th, '23

Dear Butter-Tail:

(You see how jokes are carried on, adopted by comparative strangers and improved) I don't know why I should enlarge my impressive correspondence list with any further burdens except that my impulses are often leading me astray (you may have witnessed it!) and I have felt impulsively thankful to you for your kind words to familiar others about my deportment and judgement recently, not only at public performances like the Broom Festival, but in more private and discreet unveilings as in, for instance, poems. I am anxious, therefore, my dear Kenneth, to approve your pleasant although by no means unqualified approvals of me. To whet things further, I am including a poem of my own for your casual perusal, hoping that you give me a slap on the back, or if not that, a kick in the shins.

Life is not running so high out here as it did in Shakespeare's day or in "Ulysses", but at the same time I am managing to add to my shoulders a little what with the tree-felling and enormous meals we conjointly cook and eat. I have a reputation for gravy already, it seems. I blushed like the veriest Joan when the toute ensemble including les Josephsons and les Lachaises recently burst forth with peals of applause and loud smacks following, on the occasion of a Sunday dinner. But Brown is the star chef here.

I shall apologize to you for leaving my job later on when there is plenty of wine within us and explanations and adverbs are easy. I don't know how long I shall remain here in this pleasant wilderness,

but as long as possible. So far I have had no time from chores to do the bit of projected writing that I had planned on providing me with one dollar a day, or what food costs out here approximately. Anyhow, I shan't be back in New York before the first of December. If I get back then I shall retain my room at Grove, as I have been at pains to keep it there with my things in it all this month.

Seems to me something was said around here that you might be coming out here for a short visit yourself. I can tell you the secret first hand that nobody would be more welcome, and I am only hoping that I shall be here when you come. I'll plan on seeing you in New York anyway. Regardless of my plans, I'll have to be in town on the first or second of December. Let me know if you are going to be around.

Most affectionately, your
ingrowing potato,
HART CRANE

Woodstock, N.Y.: William Slater Brown, the writer, and Edward Nagle, the painter, rented an old house here which C. used as an occasional retreat from the big city. In 1923, C. spent two months here.

Butter-Tail: Kenneth Burke elucidates this name—"To save my honor I must make haste to explain the epithet. Bill Brown used to write me as 'Beurre-que,' a kind of French for 'Burke.' From that the joke developed in bilingual punning to 'Butter-that.' And Hart added a further development, as per the epithet."

the Broom festival: Broom was a magazine sponsored by Harold Loeb. Such friends of C.'s as Matthew Josephson and Gorham Munson were contributors, and Josephson became associate editor. Munson was the founder and editor of another magazine, *Secession.* An attempt by Malcolm Cowley and others to merge the two publications failed, ending in a comic fist-fight at Woodstock. (Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* gives the full account.)

poem of my own: A typed copy of "Possessions" was enclosed.

les Lachaises: Gaston Lachaise, the sculptor, and his wife Isabel were friends of C.'s for some years.

my job: C. resigned from his job as copywriter at J. Walter Thompson's ad agency on Madison Avenue in the fall of 1923.

Woodstock
Nov. 20th, '23

Dear Kenneth:

It not only helps me out a great deal in my plans to have you use my room, but I'm glad the situation provides you with some convenience. I think you will find the place good for reading and seclusion. You are not to pay any rent except as covers the 30 days of December that you are there. That will not be due until the first of the month, of course, (the third, when you arrive, will be soon enough) and it can then be paid to the janitor directly, or Mrs. Bellardi, the landlady, who lives on McDougal Street, one door north of the Provincetown Players. If my trunk is too much in the way it can be moved to the basement. Otherwise my personal belongings with the exception of books, are out of the way. There is a broom and even Brooms. The sheets on the bed were clean when I left, but Lachaise has been using the room for a few nights in town this month, and so you will have to have them laundered. There is another set, soiled too, on the shelf right of the mantle. Enough bedclothes and blankets to keep you well, I think. I can promise the room only until January 1st, as I can't count on my money lasting any longer and will have to look for a job. It means a lot to me to keep the room and still stay out here, which I couldn't have done unless you had come along.

Bill is for rushing to the post office, so I'll rush a word to Sue, too, and promise you more "personal" attention later.

yrs affectionately,

HART

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my room: Burke's home in Andover, N.J., is some fifty miles from New York City. He sublet C.'s room at 45 Grove Street for a month and thus made it easier for C. to remain another month in Woodstock.

Provincetown Players: C. had good friends at the Playhouse, among them Sue Jenkins, married to James Light, the director, and later to Slater Brown; and Eleanor

Fitzgerald, the business manager of the theatre. Eugene O'Neill, who was connected with the Greenwich Village playhouse, was also a friend of C.'s.

110 Columbia Heights
Brooklyn
Monday, Dec. 29th, '24

Dear Kenneth:

For once the Crane has been an early bird. I have just got two orchestra seats for the Philharmonic, Sat, eve. Jan 10th—all-Stravinsky programme with the Strafer himself conducting. Please let me know as soon as possible if you can't be my guest.

I've been for four days in Cleveland, shaking hands and smiling, mostly. But discovered that there was more booze in Cleveland than ever used to be—and better. Wish you could come to our new year's eve party—at the Perry Street joint. Separate room in the basement. Dinner begins at 9:30 p.m. All your friends will be there. And there will be singing. But maybe you *are* planning to be in town then. I haven't had a chance to talk with anyone yet about developments since I left.

Yours affectionately,—

HART

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110 Columbia Heights: C.'s apartment in Brooklyn gave a perfect view of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Manhattan skyline.

Cleveland: C.'s grandmother and grandfather Hart lived there.

Perry Street: C. and friends like Burke, Peggy and Malcolm Cowley, Sue and James Light, and Allen Tate often met in John Squarcialupi's restaurant.

2/23/25
110 Columbia Hts
Brooklyn

Dear Kenneth:

Malcolm urges me to send you the enclosed series of "Voyages" as soon as possible, as he says you are in charge of all material for the next issue of "Broom", or whatever it's to be called. I trust he has already mentioned the plan of printing them therein, etc. Also, that we will have to get permission from Seaver to reprint the Fourth, which came out in the last "1924", and from Munson to reprint the First, called "Poster" in "Secession".

I didn't see half enough of you when you last came to the big city, and hope another trip isn't too far away. If you get time to write me or have the inclination to do a little extra criticism in the meantime I'd like to know something of what you think of these "voyages." The second and the last are my choice.

Best regards,

HART

"Voyages": Burke states that Crane sent him these poems in this letter, but that the six of them did not appear together in print until the publication of *White Buildings* (1926) by Horace Liveright.

Seaver: Edwin Seaver was active as an editor and fiction writer at the time. He edited *Cross-Section*, a collection of American writing; wrote the socially conscious novel *The Company*, and so on.

Box 1373 Nueva Gerona
August 25th

Dear Kenneth:

No; you don't need to worry about cones, nor octorones. They

aren't (to me) attractive enough. Some of the farier Cubanos, well! but I don't spik the languish quite well yet! I'm banking on some obscure senorita, giving her quite a load, these days; she keeps me sweating, and sometimes I feel like a burning bush.

But there is that bird here that Rimbaud refers to as making you blush. In fact birds don't sing here; they throttle, gag, cuspidor, hiss and swivel! And there are goats, whose eyes I always make a fuss over (ask Bill) and oxen, dumb, white and otherwise—which would delight you. There are mosquitoes, jiggers, ticks, hayhennies (no kidding) and orrydorries. These last two you will have to be introduced to sometime. So you see I have plenty of company.

You must notify me sometime when the Dial gets ready to get out a poetry number; I'll soon have enough to complete that number very roundly! The Bridge is coming along very well (The Brooklyn B poem is the dedication by the way) and Gorham has section I. Tell him I said to give it to you, if you care to look it over. Later on, when I get section II finished I think I'll submit it to the Dial if it isn't too long,—probably about six or seven Dial pages. It's got real Indians in it!

The subway (next-to-last section) I'm working on now; and shall certainly want your opinion on it, though it may be a mistake to ask anyone's judgment on any one section of the poem,—isolated, that is. Your statement on ideological organization of my work in general was very gratifying news, and no doggerel; for that particular organic incorporation of concepts has been a very conscientious pursuit of mine, even before I was conscious of it as an indispensable quality.

I've thought of writing you a number of times, and wondered where you were. Isn't there a new family arrival? or due? And what are you writing these days: The news from Patterson all sounds so wild, woolly and full of relatives, quaint visitors and gastronomics—that I'm beginning to congratulate myself on having found a quieter, *if* hotter corner in the world wherein to drink real beer, real Bacardi, real smoke and lay an egg or so.

Write again when you have time, Best wishes, and to all the household.

yrs
HART

Nueva Gerona: The Isle of Pines, Cuba, where C.'s family owned a house and land.

. . . bird . . . that Rimbaud . . : See *Illuminations*, "Enfance," III.

Bill: W. Slater Brown.

The Bridge: By midsummer of 1927, most of the poem was in print or accepted for publication in *The Dial, Poetry, transition, The Calendar,* and *American Caravan.* (Cf. Unterecker, p. 506.)

The subway. . . : In mid-August, 1927, T.S. Eliot asked to publish this seventh section, entitled "The Tunnel," in his *Criterion.*

Box 1373 Nueva Gerona
Isle of Pines
Cuba
Sept. 6th, 1926

Dear Kenneth:

I enclose one of the ten or so sections of The Bridge; I think this one stands sufficiently by itslef *[sic]* —at least in our experience—to be possibly interesting. It has some rather novel experiments in forms throughout.

When you haven't anything better to do, let me hear from you,—and possibly what you think of it.

As ever,
HART

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one of the . . . sections: A copy of "The Tunnel," mentioned above, was enclosed in this letter.

Sept 28th [1926]

Dear Kenneth:

As you are so well known as an enthusiast when any new or "old" literary problems of form and content crop up, I can't resist inviting your attention to the Oct. no. of "Poetry"—wherein I have a discussion with Harriet Monroe on the "famous" Melville poem, in re the dynamics of metaphor.

I'm not modest in saying that I think I come off very well with the woozy old spinster,—but that isn't why I'm speaking to you about the matter. I refer, better, to your past preoccupations with such squabble—or, rather, questions,—and as nobody ever peeps at Miss M's one-time famous sheet any more, I'm flagging the event, as it were,—and making the usual fool of myslef. *[sic]*

If you have a thought militant enough to demand registration, on one side or t'other,—why dont you mask it in perfectly decent terminology and frighten the dear old wench, or cheer her up. It would be more than fun. The problem under the gavel is vital in modern art (as well as ancient) and the linsey-woolseys of the great mid-west and corn belt ought to be given their money's worth.

Yours for Bacardi, clear and shining!

HART CRANE

PS — Please don't take my suggestion as too personally motiviated [sic] or at all clamant. But I would like you to at least see the discussion—because we have had so many words (mine were always stupid enough to surpass the memory the day after) over the same drink in the *dolce far niente* .. I'm going to spur you toward the "feast" by flattery. I was most happily surprised at your review of Spengler in the recent Dial. It's hard to find a man, these days, or any, that doesn't swallow the whole hook and sinker in favor of his private predilections . . . . Your analysis of that book (and the psyche behind it) was amazing. One of the most magnificent and formiable [sic] books I ever read, but falsely led and falsely leading. You can see it when you get under the shell of certain parts of it. You have to live in or under a

Greek sky like this, down here, to know why the ancients had a different idea of the space or "futurity" of *blue* —than did the monks and denizons [sic?] of the northern abbey's, half the time fog-filled, of the *middle ages.*

Sept 28th 1926: This letter was also written from Nueva Gerona/Isle of Pines/ Cuba, as indicated on the envelope, with the "Box 1373" number, and postmarked October 4, 1926.

metaphor: Harriet Monroe accepted and published C.'s "At Melville's Tomb" in the October 1926 issue of *Poetry*. In correspondence with C., she criticized his "champion mixed metaphors," and elicited from C. a shrewd and detailed reply about the "dynamics of metaphor," together with C.'s interpretation of images that H.M. found baffling. The exchange (on pages 34-41 of the issue cited) gives insight into C.'s characteristic use of exploratory metaphor and exploded metaphor—and gives evidence of some of C.'s fundamental brainwork.

Spengler: In a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, written three years earlier than this one, C. remarked: "Burke (between us only) keeps fighting off a true spiritual revelation which is really his birthright, though he can't consciously recognize it. So he falls a prey to Spengler and the cynics of more reasonable tongue—and lives in a rather unhappy and delicate state of skepticism." (Dec. 5, 1923.) But by summer 1926, C. had actually read *The Decline of the West* and, in a pair of letters to Waldo Frank (June 19, 20, 1926), he reacts more complexly to Spengler's thesis that Western culture is bankrupt and that art in this Winter era is futility. C. says to Frank: "This man is certainly fallible in plenty of ways but much of his evidence is convincing—and is there any good evidence forthcoming from the world in general that the artist isn't completely out of a job? Well, I may not care about such considerations 2 hours from now, but at present and for the last two months I have been confronted with a ghostliness that is new. . . . —All this does not mean that I have resigned myself to inactivity . . . A bridge will be written in some kind of style and form, at worst it will be something as good as advertising copy." Burke's assessment of Spengler in *The Dial* (Sept. 1926) would have chimed in well with C.'s own mood and judgment at the time. Burke: "Yet, however much one may snipe at Spengler's book, it remains a stupendous piece of work, formidable, lugubrious, and passionate. His historical perspectives are often brilliant and fertile; his methodology unquestionably has a future."

Patterson, NY
Aug 26th [1927]

Dear Kenneth:

Let me know when you are coming and Brown and I can meet you. Telephone *Pawling-40-F-2* if you like. I'm looking forward to a few arguments—it almost doesn't matter on what—so long as they break the rather deadly monotony of this countryside.

Thanks, by the way, for the reassurance offered on the rejection of The Air Plant. I'll do as you say and send it in later again. Meanwhile good luck and best wishes to Lilie and the little Burkes.

HC

Patterson, N.Y.: Written apparently from Slater Brown's place. Brown had bought a 150-year-old farmhouse on South Quaker Hill (also called "Tory Hill" by C.) in Pawling, N.Y.—which C. preferred to call "Patterson," using its postal address. As earlier in Woodstock, C. reveled in getting up at 5:30 a.m., breathing fresh air, and doing a lot of hard work refurbishing this ancient structure. He even bought twenty acres of land nearby, on which he hoped to build an ideal retreat for himself and his friends; but the plan never came to fruition.

"The Air Plant": In 1927, C. spoke of this poem as a "tropical effusion from the West Indies." It was drafted on Grand Cayman during his trip there in June 1926. The hurricane theme also pervades "The Return" and "Eternity," which were drafted in Patterson during the winter 1926-27. The definitive text of "The Air Plant" was published in *The Dial* for February 1928.

R.D. 1,
Gaylordsville, Conn.
August 27th [1930]

Dear Kenneth:

Your invitation was belated two days by the forwarding process, else I should have answered sooner. I'd love to join you this week end— especially since I haven't seen Burke Manor for something like

seven years during which vast improvements occurred, I'm sure. But I made arrangements over a month ago to be here with Fitzi and Lorna at this time—and so must keep my honor bright.

Our little Dantesque duelling is an amusing memory—mostly of cafe-cognac as far as I am concerned, which the later inferno of the steam room evaporated. But I rather hope you will procure the Temple Classics Edition sometime, for as I think I said, I know of none of our friends who would be more apt than you to find the Commedia an absorbing study.

My regrets again. If you stumble on the track of any jobs that I might fill please let me know. I hope to get busy as soon as possible, which may mean that we'll get together in town before long. Regards to Elspeth.

As ever,

HART

Burke Manor: Burke's home near Andover, N.J.

Fitzi: Eleanor Fitzgerald. Her country home was at Gaylordsville.

Lorna: Lorna Dietz, a friend of the Cowleys, and another loyal woman friend of C.'s.

Elspeth: Kenneth Burke's daughter.

△

Ron Padgett

Before

WELL, FOR INSTANCE," he continued, "one hears such phrases as the 'loom of history' across which time weaves its shuttle. Or expressions such as 'the warp and woof of history, or of time, or life, what-have-you. I have no objection to metaphoric expressions, of course, but I am piqued by the use of such expressions by people who really don't know what they're talking about. For example, how many people, do you think, know the difference between 'warp' and 'woof'? Very few indeed."

"Very few. In fact. . ." I hesitated, smiling lightly, ". . .I confess to not knowing which is the warp and which the woof."

"Well, don't take my remarks personally, there are a few things I don't know myself," he reassured me.

"So which is the warp and which is the woof?" I said, half hoping to learn something on this ride, half hoping he would be caught in an embarrassing trap of his own making.

"The warp is composed of the lengthwise fibres, the woof of the crossways, those woven by the shuttle."

"Oh, I see," I said, nodding in a mild wonder that was not genuine. Once again I had learned something I didn't particularly

wish to know. But it was not yet time to move the conversation to another topic, even less so to fall silent altogether.

"That reminds me," I said brightly. "When we passed over the Tweed I had the most curious feeling, that this must be a very fine river, sort of cozy and beautiful, you know what I mean?"

"I think so."

"Like a fine tweed jacket: the reassurance of old England, something like that."

"It's very interesting that a young American chap such as yourself should have such a feel for the 'old England' he never experienced directly," he laughed good-naturedly.

"Perhaps it's because I'm a poet, with a taste for extrapolating all kinds of images from a single source, some of them erroneous, of course. Like the Tweed: is it an *expensive* river? Of course not."

"No, of course not," he agreed thoughtfully. Then he said, "Would you excuse me, I must be off to the gent's."

"Of course. I'll watch your things."

"Oh yes, thank you," he said, stepping into the corridor.

I trained my eyes on his things. A plain leather briefcase, a Manchester *Guardian*, a package of Player's, and a small overnight suitcase on the rack overhead. I decided, looking at these objects, that I liked him.

Outside the countryside slid past, inducing in me a sense of loss. By returning directly to London, where the train would stop, I was losing this countryside, part of whose beauty was its constant slipping away.

Now he returned, as did my sociability. But it was he who spoke first.

"It's all very interesting, this business of cloth and such. Particularly how clothing is essentially an extension of the person wearing it, and his culture. An obvious example of course is the tartan, with its color codes and the sense of culture and family it conveys. While the tartans helped maintain society they also tended to rigidify social distinctions. True of any dress. What is most interesting is to see how

a change in dress codes reflects a larger change, such as in the nineteenth century, when a shift toward simpler and simpler men's styles tended to eradicate the distinctions between the upper class and the upper-middle class."

"I see what you mean," I put in, now genuinely interested. "By the way, I can't help noticing how knowledgeable you are on this subject. Are you a history teacher?"

"Gracious no," he laughed, "hardly. But I do teach, yes, which no doubt explains my tendency to go on like this."

"So what do you teach?"

"I am the director of the Blackwell School of Private Investigation," he answered in an ambiguous tone.

"No kidding?"

"No kidding."

"You mean people come to you to study the art of being a detective?"

"Sometimes I wonder why they do come. Not that we don't give them their money's worth. We do. But most of them, I suspect, enroll out of sheer curiosity, or excessive leisure, or some inscrutable motive, and never actually intend to become professional detectives. It seems to work like a refresher course in simply being attentive." He spread out his hands apologetically.

"But that's terrific!" I said warmly. "And do you do detective work on the side?"

"Not any more. I'm not so young as I appear to be," he laughed again. "Why don't you guess my age? If you were enrolled in my school you would be able to come very close, despite my deceptive appearance."

"Well, let's see. You do seem to be in good shape, rather like someone in his fifties, late fifties perhaps. But you've more or less told me you're older than you look, so I'd say . . . oh, I don't really know."

"Go ahead, I won't mind." He looked me straight in the eye.

"Well, how about . . . one hundred and thirty-seven?"

"Right on the nose!" he roared and fell to laughing.

"You see, I didn't need your school for that."

"Quite right," he agreed.

When I got to the hotel and opened my bags, it gave me the oddest sensation to find in one of them something that did not belong there. A plaid shawl, the kind you imagine elderly Scottish gentlemen having thrown over their laps on the veranda. The label showed that it was one hundred per cent wool and came from a shop in Edinburgh. But there was no indication of the owner, nor could I figure out how it had come to be in my luggage.

Mr. Blackwell? So far as I could remember, he was the only other person between Glasgow and London who had been alone with my luggage. But why would he have put this shawl in my suitcase so neatly folded among my effects? A practical joke? It was neither practical nor funny. A generous gesture? Knowing I would automatically refuse a gratuitous gift from someone I hardly knew? Perhaps. Or something dark and insidious which I might never understand, or worse, come to understand against my will?

I stared at the shawl for a moment and picked up the telephone.

"Operator, would you please connect me with a Mr. Blackwell of the Blackwell School of Private Investigation, or something close to that, School of Detectives. I'm not sure of the exact wording."

As I waited I glanced again at the shawl. It lay across my open suitcase on the bed, a soft, frozen flow of red and green, with tinges of yellow and a steady grid of black underneath, an almost liquid textile that concluded gracefully with fringe waving at the ends. Here and there its folds cast small shadows.

"Sir?"

"Yes."

"I have no listing for a Blackwell School of Private Investigation or a Blackwell Detective School. It would help if you knew the gentleman's Christian name."

"His what?"

"His Christian name."

"Yes, of course. Well, thank you."

Keith Waldrop

Elegy

"He comes to himself, like a gift."

—JASPERS

1

This body, mine, is only
an image of my brain, which
spreads fan-like its systems of

control. Thirty-six feet
under the terrace
of the Thames, three

fossil bones have been unburied:
an occasional and two
parietals, which articulate perfectly

together—a woman, in
her twenties probably,
from the space between

two ice ages. It's
possible to think of an infinity
limited to one

dimension. Her face, of
course, is lost, though certainly she

carried her head erect. These
fragments of a skull
are dressed out scrupulously now, for
purposes of study. Like a

vanity. Around her, we may suppose
animals—some long since
extinct—and a whole

range of expression: gestures,
sounds, some of which
still echo, perhaps, in our

emotions. Meanwhile, all
legends about roses
bleed them from white to red.

2

Saint Michael, as he flashes his
sword, should sweat. That he doesn't
is a sure sign that the great
Enemy, no longer a menace, has
nothing to fear. It's against
us—to win us over—that Michael turns the
blade just so. We so often make

the old mistake: supposing the body
'inhabited'
by soul, self, what you will. Whereas, in fact, the
cinnamon bird brings us cinnamon

and we haven't any idea where

the cinnamon grows. This account is
etched on my sleep, no amount of

wishpower will unprint it. You,
if you were young, might
glisten like olive oil. But rough
to the eye and to touch, wrinkled and
skilled, we stride the length and
breadth of the garden. There is a message
which holds the flesh to the bones—and

another one: *splash blood*
on the lintel and on
the posts of the door and stay
inside. Because once the Destroyer has
permission to destroy, he
does not distinguish between
the righteous and the unrighteous. Any evening,

with the falling temperature, dust
descends, altering every surface on
earth: hair falls, and silk,
and the silk also of spider webs. Organisms
complex and tiny beyond imagining
float invisible in the invisible air where knife-
shaped particles redden the sky with

a red they themselves do not
possess. The soul keeps
its distance. I will not discuss
the angel Murmur, who
teaches philosophy, or the likelihood
of a new ice age, or that pair of
slippers worn by Enoch before the flood.

3

Put into perspective, the dome
of the State House sinks,
draws together on itself, and becomes
obscure. It narrows, progressively, as I
move away from it, up the hill or

through the years. A glacier moves
with the same motion as a river, only
more slowly, sides dragging
against the boulders and débris of its
banks. We are all held in the

coffin of space. If I carry a stone
from Michigan to Rhode Island, is that
less 'natural' than transport by
glacier? —though ice would hardly
have pushed it this direction. Clear

crystals, some have claimed, redden and glow
into rubies, perfection at no
price, in an eternity of un-
timed processes. All day, today,
the thought of blood has

bothered me, appearing in the periphery
of my mind's eye. It surges into
the field. There is no
help for it—attention will
center on that fluent

red, as it will on any
alien substance. Imperfect fluids, viscous

bodies, are urged down certain in-
clinations by the natural
pressure of their parts. Here comes

glory: sludge within
sludge, strain-centers
in a medium with
all the properties of unannealed
glass. Thinking, like

wind that builds and then
dies down, takes
time. Do you believe
in change? This is a place
almost impossible

to leave. Three men, poured by an
avalanche into a crevasse
at the foot of Mont Blanc,
were found, forty years later, miles
downstream, still in solid

ice, coming closer and closer to the
surface. On my one hand,
stasis—on the
other, striving for effect. Break a
twig from a long dead elm, blood

branches from the act. No
image escapes, forked lightning or
lake. At times, I must admit, I
take the nearest objects—anything at
all—for comfort, for defense

against an empty field, the vacant
air. But other times, the spaces between things
all but make up for the intervening
entities. Point-instants, I
remind myself, are nothing, from

nothing. There is not much
time for me to
take. If everything behaved
exactly as I want it to, it
might as well be

all in my head. In my
brain is a constant
gray, cancelling silence. I only
glimpse, where they run at un-
certain depths, blue veins. Skim through

the alphabet. You'll see
how the letters follow their set
order, like the formula for some
catastrophe, called forth by
accident, irreversible.

4

Sorrow and love, in the old hymn, flow
mingled down. There are times when you
realize you're lost by seeing something
you recognize, some known configuration that couldn't be
where you thought you were. I notice,
now and again, how messianic themes
darken the clearest thought, spilling

blood and water across simple
vistas. The Creation is definitely

unfinished. The largest motion—to, fro,
up, down—collapses to a steady but
painful vibration, symmetrical like a
web around the fabulous notion
of 'center.' What I describe
is the region inside these lines which, being drawn,
pattern the interplay of nerve
and muscle. Each effort
surpasses and inscribes its

aim. To reach past the table is to
try for totality, the whole
terrestrial plane. If I forget
you, my memory has not
failed me—it has provided knowledge of
endless loss. Crystals driven downward
drift into impassable peaks. There is a second
air, finer than air, all-pervasive, riddling
the world and supporting the subtle

orders. The righteous are unredeemable, possessed
as they are by their own good angels. Under the
mask the image develops and
through the image, as a goal,
all the colors of the natural world, mixed
and not altogether comprehensible. Everything grows
heavier, at least I do, and—not to surrender
the high tone of gravity—the universe
displays a degrading shift towards red.

5

Lips meet: spirit
breathes into
spirit, or a vague mist
forms. Hardly anything matters to me now
but work, which will be accomplished—if
accomplished—neither by hand nor by
fire, but through its own heat, other
heat serving only to ward off

the cold. Red sandstone near
Shrewsbury bears impressions of raindrops—the rain
of an age inconceivably remote. One can even
tell from what direction the shower
fell, which impressed the sandy surface. I
will sleep soon, not in order to rid myself of
consciousness, but to rejoin partial and
impossible objects outlawed by the will to go

on. The creature left dry on the sleeve of a
drying ocean, who developed
breath in defense against a world of air,
although that creature has grown to think
my thoughts, circulate my
blood—still,
I live on the surface, in
a world not yet

evolved. I am not trying to express
anything, only to
sound my way from tones
to other tones. A gesture

may also be a signature. When I last
thought about it, I thought
that perhaps too much emphasis has been put
on both pity and terror.

6

While she was holding forth (Madame
Blavatsky) a shower of
roses fell from the empty air. Or so it's
recorded. Recorded

likewise: that Madame was as
startled as everyone else. Sometimes I
wish my sense of theatre were
less extended. Memories of

mere tone form a dark but active
screen in front of what must have been
real events, things that
happened, in the same

way that the Garden of Eden
flourishes over failures
of recall. In the same way,
we take the world apart for

lumber, only to find
not enough boards for a bookcase,
or else no nails. To take on the power
of an animal—for

instance, a bird's faculty

of flight—one must first
develop that particular animal's
appetite. The perspective here

is askew, without guarantee of
communication with any out-
side, where we might stand or maybe
walk. The strength of the state

gleams in the evening like a
tall empty helmet. If I needed
help, what hill would I climb or
lift my eyes toward?

7

I would not want to waste what
little I know of
whatever, but it continually
escapes me, driving home like
rain. Mystics know many
ways to sit, masters of still

gymnastics. Then too, my days
scatter off into conversations, classes,
idle chatter and other facets
of hunger. I must learn to consider the
areas I walk through as
unpeopled—dense growth

has got to become a medium
for reflections. How else remember
what otherwise is only

memorable? Like the dead in *All Hallows Eve* who haunt the places they always haunted, but now

as if alone. There are three evil destinies: to be an animal, a demon, a hungry ghost—evil because all these are hungry, and remain so. A candle in a pumpkin skull brings to the door

polite East Side children dressed as ghosts, demons, beasts of prey. On the other hand, one is made up as a butterfly, monstrous, like a blaze, among dead leaves and the wooden

houses. It's hard to imagine these bodies made of mind—but requiring, just to function, a world of resistances. By an advanced technique, one can contemplate a duplicate of oneself, within one's own body, and

draw it forth. The hermit Rolle felt such fire in his breast he put his hand there to check. Whom do I know scorched by the spirit? Many years ago, I wanted to write about prayer, but was hindered by centuries of

practice—also my religion got in the way. Am I finally ready? More

likely, such impulses, fading like printed
pages left in sunshine, will have to
be satisfied by abstract surfaces, which
spread as we pull away from them.

8

Some gods are too high to be
petitioned—either altogether sublime or just

too *good.* Replaced, particle by
particle, bone, under favorable

conditions, retains its original
minute structures, as in life, though

not alive. For flesh to be
preserved is rarer, though

mammoths, found frozen in Siberia, have
still both hide and hair. There are two

times, the prospect of which provides
no possibility of hope: before

and after. The most common form
of fossil is simply a space where

some creature was. If I had my
prayer, I'd be replaced, moment

by moment, by some harder

activity, something formal enough

that one wouldn't feel one had to
look for meaning. You, if from a distance you

recognized, for instance, my way of
walking, could run to meet me.

Section one of *Elegy* was published in *College English*.

△

BOOK REVIEWS

Fame & Love in New York. ED SANDERS.
Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1980.

by GEORGE F. BUTTERICK

First Ed Dorn and Tom Clark, and now Ed Sanders. We come again to an Age of Satire. In his most recent writing, Sanders has taken a cool if no less brilliant eye to the world about him. *Fame & Love in New York* is an intricate lampoon set "in the near future, with technology slightly more advanced than it actually is." It is written in a studied and almost formal manner, an elaborate style ("anger bounced into, and from, the reticulations in people's skulls"), with few exclamation points. Devoted readers will immediately recognize the change (as much a development of the times as of the writer): the language is no longer bardic or even outrageous; the old "assault on the culture" is grown more selective and no longer as "total." Mixed with Sanders' usual high-tech inventiveness (there are even patentable devices throughout, bearing registered trademarks) is tightly probing language. The plot is spacious and allows a target to be focused or diffused at will, drawing in a greater number of victims. There is the same proliferation of names and data as in preceding books, such as *The Family* and *Tales of Beatnik Glory*, but suspended in a satirical solution and supplied with footnotes which serve to remind us the narrative is consciously controlled. Old friends appear (the Diogenes Liberation Squadron from *Investigative Poetry*), here jostled by hordes of new names, devices, plots, competing for the reader's attention. The wit is drier, more grainy, less a string of gags than *Shards of God.* For some, the writing may seem a spin of whimsy rather than righteous necessity or deep spiritual urge, as if Sanders had settled back into a role of droll commentator rather than energizer or motivator. But for the most part the bold language and far-reaching images still serve him (despite an imprecise use of "ineffable"): a character is "nearly unerring in nark-sniff. He was like a pot-whiffling canine at a JFK cargo hangar, so ineffable was he in pulling a dowser's wand scene on undercover police officers." His strength continues to be descriptive—"She twisted roughly back and forth as if she

were lying within a wooden gold-mining sluice, and her hands were clenching the wooden sides, and a torrent of eternity rolled down over her, nuggets of golden pleasure buffeting the tingling red rose of her perfect calling"—while pinning characters in culturally compromising circumstances.

Part two of the novel, "The Search for Hart Crane's Trunk," is especially entertaining, with its world of archivists (it is a "data-retentive era") and directions to young poets how to form a "Letter Loop" (four such poets write each other daily for fifteen years: "Allowing for inflation, let us say that at the end of the fifteen years, the letters go for fifty each. Therefore, as of moolah, you obtain 12 X 365 X 15 X 50, and you're again upon one of those droll strolls down along green grab creek"). Throughout, the preoccupation is with deception. Characters abound, teasingly named. There are conceptual artist Milton Rosé and poet Ione Appleton, exploiters both, who along with the Balzac Study Group of intrepid insurgents and the post-Fugs, post-punk J'Accuse rock band, pass in and out of the world (and the market) of culture. All are characters without personalities and only as deep as their language. The target of this professional writing and withering attention is "the ultra-hip, ultra-corrupt New York Art World where the deal goes down, and the wheel goes around each and every day." (Thematically, an odd book for the Netzahualcoyotl Historical Society to publish, one might at first say, until one realizes it is hardly limited to New York or Art.) It's a world that readily deserves a raking, such sweet excoriation. But why? Why now? (The overriding question never fully withdraws itself, especially after the author himself says on the very first page, "there had been infinitely more outrageous things occurring in the universe.") Finally, what seems to be the entire cast from Sanders' *Dom-Int* stories, the American surveillance forces led by "Hunk" Forbes, emerges from a clearing in the data-horde to bring a violent end to the world of Milton Rosé, while the newly discovered trunk of Hart Crane's personal possessions and manuscripts becomes a Grail for what is left of the characters.

The novel is an excursus, sustained by its own inventiveness and governed by Sanders' virtuosity, creating situations in which to land a satiric punch or poke a rib. It rollicks rather than perceptibly develops in any naturalistic fashion. For some readers, it will be too knowing a world, too sophisticated and satirical and self-conscious; in it and by it, the Beat innocence is already over and a counterthrust of irony begun. △

Notes for Echo Lake. MICHAEL PALMER.
North Point. 1981.

by JED RASULA

The initial concern of any artisan or magus is how to breathe, prelude to learning how to breathe life into the opus. How to apply color (ochre on skull), give ruddiness, signs of life. "Colors are the traces of ideas," Michael Palmer writes in "Alogon" (p. 72)—a notion which soon erodes into "Colors are substitutes for ideas" and "Colors seem to embody the ideas." Colors are both signs of what lie within, and decoys to lure it out. "So here is color. Here is a color darkening or color here is a darkening." (p. 6) That darkening may be the "transparency of the mirror," the nimbus confusing subject from object, original from reflection, opacity from transparency—whatever it is, it splits and like a worm divides into new bodies each time. Language is parthenogenic. "The verb divides us evenly into two objects," Palmer wrote in *Without Music* (p. 43). "Notes for Echo Lake 8" (p. 48) is "for one to seventy-seven voices" (in 77 lines). *Notes for Echo Lake* is a book of 93 numbered pages, but in reading it lengthens to hundreds (I recommend at least two or three readings in succession, and one reading of the title poem by itself—for which an effort must be made because it's distributed throughout the book). Repeated reading abolishes chronology, and colors appear—from the text a ruddy skull in ritual disposition ushers you in. Red is one of the approaches: "All days were red in the margin" (p. 1). "He says this red as dust" (3). "The dust of course might equally be grey, the wall red, our memories perfectly accurate" (5). "The river is red" (7). "I was the blue against red and a voice that emptied" (15). ". . . red/as a second following dawn" (21). "What does the juggler's redness tell us" (22). ". . . red meaning red, and the flag as an object, and red instead of red" (28). "The lion red as a lobster is green" (29). "Hills cancel redness" (35). ". . . what blue as of a letter red as of a name written backward" (40). "These red hills are said to be green" (43). ". . . forgotten in order to be presently relearned/as 'red' or 'stone' or 'thirty-six' " (46). "Here I will insert the word 'red' to indicate a tree" (69). "Red is a most dreadful thing" (72). "Red of April" (76). "My favorite the lady of the upper middle-class with her red parasol" (81). "When the word for red is said to mean white" (82). "Do we live beneath

Red Hill" (84). ". . . red and redder/than the tree itself" (90). Red and blue are the poses of the verse, the anchor of their turning, tropisms of verses as 'versus.' They are the musical staff on which the epic gestures of local intent are composed: raising a window, opening a door, lighting a candle, reading a book. The scale is at once cosmic and domestic—because it is told in *relief* (as if the letters were rising off the page and casting shadows—see p. 29), through monumentalities innate to language like choice of phrase and rhythmic dexterity—the figures that stand out are massively interpersonal, not so much whole people as wedges fitted in between disparate human traits in the epic quest of ascertaining grammatical certainty: "No one exactly lived in the house. The heart cannot be influenced directly. Light affects the breath. They are fascinated by a moth. The breath is troubled. You look until the trouble stops. Two dead men are playing cards." (p. 77)

Such people as there are are rather like the Hermetic visitors, guides in the realm of planetary relations; they appear like figures in Macrobius' dream, quicksilver to the spatial and musical spirals which the poet enters by recounting the implements and reciting the elementary gestures of working in the

> Garden in which three of the four points reside
> With no sign of true north
> Claiming she had survived three-hundred seasons
> And showed me the unbroken line
>
> (p. 89)

It is an undisputably microcosmic/macrocosmic order, and the apparent ease of the lines shows Palmer to be a confident and careful initiate: "The mountain quivers on the surface of the lake." (p. 69)

There are pieces in *Notes* that tap the awe myth arose from, glints of vivid ore in mud—"Documentation" and "False Portrait" (pp. 36 & 37) are stunning instances—but it is in the title sequence and in the lengthy "Alogon" that Palmer's work unforgettably embeds itself in the mind. There is something in this language (not unlike the later Beckett) that carries the breath, pace and intonation so successfully that the reader's consciousness is not simply identical with the text but is momentarily replaced by it or indistinguishable from it:

. . . we saw passing with eyes shaded against
the glare lover with gryphon's wings kneeling
in an attitude of prayer waves lapping at the
foot of our bed have been had been ill somewhat
ill three suns crossing a winter sky myself in
blue velvet jacket strolling past the half-open
window ghost following one holds a lamp the other
a sword and a sponge blue as of mountains rust
broken words after language wide toothless grin
open words after language blue as of a greeting
or sudden end one mark indicating what blue as
of a letter red as of a name written backward. (pp. 39-40)

The writing in this particular section of "Notes. . ." is unpunctuated, so the pulse of attention can only be followed by rhythm, which is here and throughout the book as exacting as any poetry published in many years (and I strongly urge reading out loud to establish the literal sense of it). "Notes. . ." seems in fact to be generated out of sentences flawlessly balanced, out of "Words that come in smoke and go", such as: "We have never been happy here have never been happier." "It had been a good possibly even a terrible winter." "Some things he kept while some he kept apart. "Does physics know Caesar by name?" "As they may send him though not as himself, for example to war." The pivot of the series is "Notes for Echo Lake 9"—in one line only: "Was lying in am lying on I is I am it surrounds." Olson, Irby, Grenier, Palmer and once in a while a few others have arrived at poems so precise no more than a line is one of them.

It is Michael Palmer's *Notes for Echo Lake*, along with Ron Silliman's *Tjanting*, that definitively places San Francisco on the literary map of 1980. If Dziga-Vertov's *Man With Movie Camera* is the film to go with Ron Silliman's *Tjanting*, Palmer's should be Chris Marker's *La Jettee* (cited on p. 17, actually). Marker's film is a brief tale of burrowing into the future to reclaim the world before its demise—which also lies in the future—conducted through hypnogogic experiments. This might well be Palmer's theme, if it weren't for the omnipresent calibration of the medium, line by line, phrase by phrase, such that we see in place of a theme a ready instrument, a tool-within-a-tool. Marker's film is composed of stills lasting several seconds each, except for one filmclip of a woman's eye moving; Palmer's

Notes for Echo Lake guides the reader past the movement, through the eye, and into the still or hush as over pond or lakewater which is the surface drum of inner ear exposed. △

Falkland Road. Photographs and text by MARY ELLEN MARK. Alfred Knopf. 1981.

by ELIOT WEINBERGER

The three worlds (Sky-Air-Earth) were united; the gods divided them into three. The worlds grieved that they had been divided in three, and the gods said, "Let us take the three sorrows from these three worlds." Indra removed their sorrow, and the sorrow which the god removed from this earth entered the whore; the grief which god removed from the air entered the eunuch; and the grief from heaven entered the sinful man or the rogue.

—THE BRAHMANAS

Falkland Road, in the Kamathipura section of Bombay, is the red-light district for what we would call the working class (in India, materially above the peasant but below the merchant). It is a short walk from two other flumes of the city, one turbulent, one almost still: *Bombay Central*—railroad station for millions, home for thousands, antheap and inevitable sluicegate in the endless flow of pilgrimages, business trips and family visits that is Indian life; and the *Towers of Silence*—forbidden both to passersby and to the faithful, where the *Parsis* leave their dead to be eaten by vultures, so that water, earth and fire remain undefiled by corpses. The three form a delta of passage: passion, pilgrimage, death. And mirror to the spiritual non-passages: the sex without orgasm of Tantrism, the motionless pilgrimage of Yoga, and the release from the cycle of death and rebirth of Buddhism.

Falkland Road, like everything in India, is compartmentalized and ar-

ranged vertically and horizontally. Like red-light districts anywhere, it is both an epitome and a parody of its society. At the bottom are the "cage girls": bizarrely made-up and dressed, they stand at street level in a barred version of the Indian shop, lifting their skirts and shouting obscenities at the men in the street. Despised by the other prostitutes, they are the cheapest tricks (about 30¢) and function as a grotesque caricature of the Indian woman as an immobile commodity and object of desire. Their opposites on the bottom rung are the street girls (and girls is the word—the workers of Falkland Road are mainly very young teenagers): independents, tied to no brothel, who find their own customers in the cafes, work in hired rooms and sleep in the streets. Mistrusted by the other prostitutes for their freedom and self-reliance, their very mobility is a negation of the traditional Indian woman and her parody the cage girl.

Above the street are the brothels, where the girls are among the last in India to live in a strict version of *purdah*. They rarely go out, and are rigidly controlled—but also protected and literally blessed daily—by their *madams*. They are more conservatively dressed than the cage girls; they could pass unnoticed in a crowd, except, perhaps, for their beauty. As the *purdah* system collapses in modern India, it is curious that these last sequestered women are the ones most accessible to men. The structure remains, even when it is in absolute contradiction to its original function.

Parallel to the female brothels are those of the *hinjras*, who work both in cages and in the rooms above. They are the most mysterious caste in North India: transvestites, many of them eunuchs, who dance at every festival, and at weddings and funerals, playing the role of Fool, object of derision, the chaos that reaffirms the order of "normal" society, but also, strangely, as images of the cosmic androgyny, the oneness of the universe. Their ranks are replenished by abandoned and, some say, kidnapped infants and boys. Their main source of income is prostitution; their clients homosexual men.

Falkland Road has remained largely unchanged since the last major report to the West of its activities: Alfred Dyer's dispatches to the English papers in 1887. But there is one difference: a hundred years ago, the workers and customers on the street were interracial. (And, interestingly, the white women were almost all Jews who had fled the persecution in Eastern Europe. Dyer noted, by the way, that they behaved with far less "decorum" than their Indian counterparts.) Today Falkland Road is an entirely Indian in-

stitution.

Mary Ellen Mark, a well-known Magnum photographer, "had thought about Falkland Road for ten years," but her early attempts at taking pictures there had been frustrated: crowds of men gathered around, and the prostitutes threw water and garbage on her from the windows above (as they had done, a hundred years earlier, on members of the Bombay Midnight Mission). She writes, in perhaps the most revealing moment of the book:

> In October of 1979 I decided to return to Bombay and try somehow to enter the world of these women and to photograph them. I had no idea if I could do this. But I knew I had to try. The night before I left I had a vivid dream: I was a voyeur hiding behind a bed in a brothel on Falkland Road watching three transvestite prostitutes making love. I awoke amused and somewhat reassured. Perhaps my dream was a good sign.

Obviously, by her own standards, Mark had "success." This elegant book is the result, itself apparently a commercial success. But what is one to make of these successes, and of this dream that hangs over the chasm between Falkland Road and *Falkland Road*?

Photography begins with the transformation of the familiar into the exotic. The first photographs were of ourselves and of local sights. The self became the other: one sat motionless for twenty minutes for a daguerrotype not to see oneself, but to see how one looked in a photograph, to see another image of the self. (And later, time would add a second layer of exoticism: the strangeness we all feel, looking at old snapshots of ourselves.) It was, in the anonymity of the industrial cities, the beginning of self-consciousness, alienation, of "modern" man.

But photography, after the initial amazement, quickly assumed a more important role: the transformation of the exotic into the familiar. Not only did everything in the world exist to end up in a photograph (as Sontag has written, paraphrasing Mallarmé) but the world itself seemed a bundle of gathered photographic images. Photography became a form of both tourism and colonialism. Its rise, not coincidentally, is parallel to that of the great capitalist empires.

This tourism was always vertical and horizontal. Horizontal: to the ends

of the earth, where the new photographer-adventurers travelled to supply the inexhaustible demand for new "views." And vertical (though mainly downward): epitomized by the title of Jacob Riis' classic 1890 study of the New York poor, *How the Other Half Lives*. Today, the search for new images of horizontal tourism has played out: we know what most of the world looks like in a photograph, sit bored and polite through friends' slide shows of Urumchi and Baffin Island, and will buy a book of "travel photographs" only if the photographer is extraordinary. But vertical photographic tourism is flourishing, now more than ever. Middle-class curiosity about the fringes of society seems insatiable, and the collection of these images has become a small industry for the leagues of "photo-journalists": talented workers, like Mark, who lack the transformative vision of the great "fine art" photographers. In recent years there have been books of photos of wrestlers, strippers, tattooed people, bodybuilders, transvestites, junkies, shopping bag ladies, mental patients (including Mark's own *Ward 81*) and various groups of urban and rural poor—to name only a few—but none of typists, management consultants, checkers players. Like the Romans pouring liquamen (fish emulsion) over their food, to get a little taste to a palate deadened by the lead from their water pipes and goblets, we have become sated, numb to ordinary photographs of the present world (old photos, though, are another matter). To get high, we need an increasingly stronger fix of the strange.

Daguerre believed he had "made a window men look through," much as Whitman wanted to create "a perfectly transparent plate-glass style." Both of course were wrong: a photograph, no less so than a poem, is a metaphor, not the world. The window is the camera itself. For although photographs, as Ansel Adams' formula goes, are made and not taken (and in fact much of the work takes place in the darkroom, its procedures—and ultimate appreciation—not all that different from those of painting) the act of photography, the moment of pressing the shutter, may be the only new development in creative composition since Lascaux.

It is an immediate act, without recollection, absorption, transformation, revision; it is an action painting produced in a split-second. And it is an act of immediate power. The camera is a weapon, its language ballistic. With either, as any tourist or terrorist knows, one can get a stranger or a crowd of strangers to do almost anything. But the camera is also a window: the

photographer always stands removed from the action, whether or not it is under his or her direction. In the familiar disaster scenario, the photographer shoots first, and then aids the victim, if at all.

To stand at the window watching, like Tonio Kröger, like Proust, has been a frequent metaphor for the artist. With photography, the metaphor becomes actual practice. To photograph is to have Superman's X-ray vision: to see everything in the world, but at a distance. It is to collect as many images as possible from a world one sometimes controls, but does not participate in. It is to dream that one is a voyeur, watching three eunuchs fuck in a seedy Bombay brothel, and to wake, not appalled, but refreshed.

Falkland Road is a book told by its cover: a frame of gold letters on a rich maroon; within the frame a portrait of a stunningly beautiful woman, seen nude from the waist up, wearing only an ornate necklace. It is a photograph from a fashion magazine: the woman is breathtaking but vacuous; she stares at the camera and at us with a model's haughtiness and hostility; nothing is revealed. Only inside the book do we learn that her name is Putla (an eerie resemblance to the Spanish *puta*), that she is 13 years old, that she was sold to the brothel at 12, that her madam complains that it took four months to "break her in." The contrast of image and caption is upsetting: in the absence of intentional irony, all we are left with is the photographer's seeming indifference.

In 65 photographs, shot in deep but often murky color, we see the women and transvestites washing, waiting, clowning, posing, nursing their babies, dressing, cleaning their rooms and, amazingly, working. With the exception of the latter, these are fairly ordinary photographs of ordinary activities, given interest only because we know who these people are, at least professionally. Many of the pictures are characterized by that peculiarly Indian *stare*. The camera is still a novelty in the country, and many—from Louis Malle in his epic *Phantom India* to Mira Nair in her short documentary *Jama Masjid Street Journal*—have found inescapable that look of blank curiosity, fear and impossible distance. In India, it is the subject, not the photographer, who sees more intensely.

In these photographs we always sense Mark as an outsider, not in the tension of a cultural clash that might have produced more interesting work, but

rather a simple and numb remoteness. The effect is disturbing: the prostitute, the extreme example of the man or woman as sex item, is even further objectified. Though a comparison is somewhat unfair, one turns with relief back to the photographs taken by E.J. Bellocq in the Storyville section of New Orleans at the turn of the century. Bellocq, a hydrocephalic dwarf, befriended—but apparently never hired—the prostitutes; his photogaphs, a dialogue between outcasts, remain among the most loving portraits of women. Although nothing is known of these women—and little of Bellocq—no captions are necessary: Storyville lives in a way that Falkland Road, despite Mark's claim of love and friendship for these "special women," never does.

What are remarkable, however, are the "working" pictures. They are probably the first non-pornographic representations of Indian sex since the last of the great miniature paintings, in the 19th century. Prostitutes have long served as nude models for both painting and photography—they are, after all, accustomed to being undressed objects—but it is surprising that Mark was able to persuade their johns to also pose, and in action. And it is the presence of the johns that gives us our only glimpse of how squalid life on Falkland Road is, for though the women all have a natural dignity and occasionally beauty—the transvestites look as alien as transvestites anywhere—the johns are unrelievedly sleazy.

The sex, on bare mattresses in tiny cubicles, is mainly depressing: we are centuries away from the exuberance of Indian erotic art. (And, by the way, from its variety: according to an interview with Mark, the sex is all "straight fucking;" the thousand pretzel positions that India invented have, at least on Falkland Road, unravelled to one.) In the saddest picture in the book, a man, still wearing his gaudy shirt, lies on top of a young woman who stares at the camera with a resigned and vacant melancholy. The perspective would be that of Kali, goddess of annihilation, looking down with a camera as she stands on the back of Rati, copulating with Kama in the familiar miniature scene. But this girl's name is Kamla, not Kama, and she speaks in the caption: "Often when I am with a customer, I hold my legs straight and he doesn't even enter me. After all, my body is my own." Kama and Rati were symbols of the desire that created the universe; in Kamla eyes are, almost, the end of the world.

Falkland Road can only be defined by negatives. Mark is no reformer: the photographs and her short, mainly uninformative introduction have no cries of indignation. The book is not elegant pornography. Nor is it a feminist work: although portions inexplicably appeared in *MS* magazine, there is no simple rapport, let alone solidarity or sisterhood, between Mark and her subjects. I take the appeal of the book, finally, to be touristic. It is a piece of that unchanging equation of exotic and erotic that permeates almost every travel document: in the mind, sex is always more available, or wilder, someplace else. *Falkland Road* not only exploits this fantasy—in spite of itself, in spite of the dreary evidence—but ups the ante. For, unlike pornography or a travel novel or an ad for a Caribbean resort, we know who these women and transvestites are, and where they are. This may have a kick for certain male readers, as a sort of luxurious mail-order catalogue of fantasies. Why women are buying the book, as they are, is beyond me. It is so obviously the product of a doubled colonialist mentality: Third World plus Prostitution in one appropriating package. Perhaps, for some, the fact that the photographer is a woman somehow makes it all acceptable. I don't see how. But photography has made us eager to possess the Aleph, to be the Invisible Man, to see everything—at a safe distance. We dream we are Mary Ellen Mark dreaming she is a voyeur. Yet, on the other side of the window—her camera, our book—lies a piece of the world, Falkland Road itself, a reality not many of us could stand for more than a few minutes. In the end, the book has the same dumb fascination of watching firemen battle a blaze around the corner, knowing that one's own house is safe. △

The Eidophusikon

by Robert N. Essick

On the evening of February 26, 1781, a group of curiosity-seekers were ushered into a beautifully appointed room in the London residence of the painter Philip James de Loutherbourg. At half-past seven, they were led upstairs to a theatre capable of seating a hundred and thirty. The lights dimmed, and an illuminated screen painted with a view of London seen from

Greenwich Hill appeared on the elegant little stage. Suddenly, the morning mists embracing the city began to disperse. The sun rose bright and clear to reveal ships moving up and down the Thames and cattle grazing in Greenwich Park. After a brief musical interlude, the movable screens and focused candles shifted to the next performance: *Noon over Tangiers*, with a prospect of Gibraltar. Next came *Sunset near Naples, Moonlight on the Mediterranean*, and the concluding scene, *A Storm at Sea, and Shipwreck*. In later programs, de Loutherbourg produced his masterpiece, *Satan Arraying his Troops on the Banks of the Fiery Lake, with the Raising of the Palace of Pandemonium: from Milton.* A towering volcano poured liquid fire into the lake from which arose Moloch, Beelzebub, and a multitude of other demons, summoned by their once-majestic leader. Colored glass threw bolts of lightning across the painted sky while artificial thunder shook the audience. The pursuit of the sublime, its patrimony from Milton and love of multi-media *terribilità*, had reached its eighteenth-century climax.

The "Eidophusikon"—de Loutherbourg's portmanteau name for his invention, made from the Greek words for "form" and "nature"—was a vast but short-lived success. His bizarre potpourri of *trompe-l'oeil*, lantern slides, mechanical models, and opera attracted leading artists such as Gainsborough, who attended evening after evening, and Reynolds. The young Turner may have seen later performances. Blake's love for art and drama might even have led him to the theatre where he could have seen a melodramatic side-show to his own visions of eternity in love with the productions of time.

The eidophusikon fell from popular favor, then into disrepair, and finally succumbed to a real fire early in the nineteenth century. Yet it has its unacknowledged progeny. What would Gainsborough, Turner and Blake have made of that eidophusikon redivivus, D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*? △

Salamander: Selected Poems of Robert Marteau.
Translated by Anne Winters.
Princeton University Press (The Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation). 1979.

Traité du blanc et des teintures/Treatise on White and Tincture. ROBERT MARTEAU. Translated by Barry Callaghan.
Exile Editions. 1979.

by ERIC GANS

These two bilingual volumes are complementary. The first traces the evolution of the poet's work over a period of sixteen years; the second gives us in full the finest product of this evolution.

Robert Marteau, a French poet and essayist who has taken up residence in Montréal, is a composer of sacrificial landscapes. Born in 1925 in a Charente village on the medieval pilgrimage route to Compostello, Marteau has constantly sought to unify the disparate details of the countryside in a vision of sacrifice that is the modern poet's revenge on a world deprived of its ritual unity. From the early poem "Royauté/Royalty" in *Royaumes/Kingdoms* (1962) to the intricate quasi-narrative of *Traité du blanc et des teintures* (1978), Marteau's world has slowly evolved from the rural to the organic. The "sense of place" of the first poem, its aristocratic medievalism reminiscent of Saint-John Perse, has displaced itself from the Charente to Spain and Yugoslavia to be finally transcended in a locus of creation that is both the garden of Eden and the earth as a whole.

Marteau's poetry, rich in imagery and verbal texture, renews the eternal challenge of art to its analysts. The lack of obvious narrative continuity in the longer poems makes the logic behind the often bewilderingly dense series of images most elusive. The poet seems to make the thematic figure of sacrifice—funeral pyre, bullfight, crucifixion—serve as a guarantee of the unity of an entire universe of experience. For this reader, at least, these poems are more satisfying in their details than in their overall composition. In contrast, the *Traité*, a single work loosely composed of 86 brief (four to eight-line) strophes, makes a formal separation of part from whole that allows the reader to savor each figure independently while keeping in mind

its general context.

The longer poems—"Royauté/Royalty", "Taureaux dans Bayonne/Bulls in Bayonne", "Travaux pour un bûcher/Work for a Pyre", "Circé"—are undoubtedly the major works in ambition as well as length, but the reader may find shorter pieces like "Charente", "Charente, encore/Charente, again", and the series of bullfight sonnets from *Travaux sur la terre* more approachable. The final lines of "Charente, encore" express an *art poétique* that gives the measure of Marteau's poetic ambition and finesse:

> Graine noire, poudre et pays dans mes yeux,
> D'eux, je fais mon four et je change en vérité
> Ce qui n'est que chute, images tombées.
>
> Black seed, homeland and powder blown in my eyes,
> These make my furnace, where the Fall and windfallen
> images turn into truth.
>
> (Winters, p. 30-31)

The insistent alliterations (*poudre—pays, fais—four, change—chute*) and final rhyme, the reprise of *yeux* by *D'eux* in the following line, illustrate the concern for sound-patterns that make Marteau's poetry a pleasure to read aloud. The countryside (*pays*) like powder in his eyes becomes an alchemist's furnace in which the poet transforms fallen images into poetic truth. The poet's role remains that defined by Baudelaire (*Tu m'as donné ta boue et j'en fait de l'or!* You gave me your mud and I made it into gold!), but without either the hyperbolic irony of the mud/gold opposition or the Baudelairean spirit of synthesis that has already dissolved the dust of fallen rural images into the generality of urban mud.

Ms. Winters' translation of this passage is not truly representative here of her generally sensitive and faithful rendering into excellent English poetry, although its weaknesses are not without example elsewhere. The most notable of these is an almost perverse tendency to invert pairs of words—here *poudre et pays* become "homeland and powder," no doubt to clarify the reference of *dans mes yeux*, although this quirk is found without apparent justification elsewhere. (Thus for example, p. 22-23, *Brûlant et engendrant*/Engendering and blazing; p. 70-71 . . . *les guérisons, les merveilles*/ . . . its marvels and cures. Both examples are taken from the last lines of poems where one would expect the author's concluding emphasis to

merit more consideration.) The final idea of the poem is unfortunately inverted as well. Marteau changes into truth what is only Fall, fallen images (*chute* refers to the Fall of man in the Garden), whereas Winters' ending eliminates the poetic first person in favor of a conclusive but passive "turning into" truth that exudes a smug fatalism foreign to the original.

An atypical example of this fine translation, and one that merits a counterexample:

> Oh! c'est déjà le vent d'été . . . Le bois
> Des barques et des râteaux craque sous le bleu;
> De toi, je n'ai trouvé que cette gaine d'écailles
> Qui ressemble à la pelure sèche d'une grosse couleuvre.
>
> Already the summer wind . . . The wooden
> Rakes and ships' planks crack beneath the blue;
> But of you I've found only this dry sheath of scales
> Like the paring of some giant snake.
>
> (p. 36-37)

Here, the inversion of rakes and ships is justified by the happy effect of the added "planks," and the shortened last line is a definite improvement over the original. Winters is here inspired to surpass her model in concentration and vigor—compare "this dry sheath of scales" with the rather flat "cette gaine d'écailles"—while remaining faithful to its spirit.

△

Barry Callaghan's translation of the *Traité du blanc et des teintures* is somewhat less faithful to its original than Winters'. In their translations of the same texts (26 of the 86 strophes of the *Traité* are included in *Salamander*), Winters appears more hampered by the strophic format than Callaghan, who is willing to sacrifice something of Marteau's meaning in order to remain close to the highly individualized rhythm and balance of each strophe. One factor that makes comparison difficult is that, surprising as it may seem, the division of the strophes into lines is quite different in the two volumes. One would assume that Callaghan's complete *Traité* follows Marteau's original edition (not available to me), but it is difficult to believe that the poet has not approved the recombination of lines that transform virtually every strophe of the Winters volume.

The following example will serve to illustrate both the hermetic charm of Marteau's organic imagery and the relative success of his two translators:

Hors des liens la floraison explore
en sinueux parcours la paroi de l'ogive,
ondule
comme dans l'oeil la rumeur
d'une prairie au vent de mai,

Free from all bonds, the lengths
of sinuous bloom explore
the pointed arch, and wave
in the eye like remote
prairie murmurs in the wind of May,

(Winters, p. 106-7)

Hors des liens
la floraison explore en sinueux parcours
la paroi de l'ogive,
ondule comme dans l'oeil la rumeur
d'une prairie au vent de mai.

Unshackled
sinuous lengths of bloom explore
the arched wall,
undulating in the pupil like a prairie
murmur of May wind.

(Callaghan, 26-27)

Callaghan does not shrink from converting Marteau's eye to a pupil, or from transforming the murmur of a prairie in the wind into a prairie murmur of wind. But he follows closely the relative lengths of the lines and their degree of grammatical dependency. Winters, even given the different (and to my taste more effective) arrangement of the lines, fails in her more faithful rendering of the words to maintain the spirit of Marteau's prosody. Her broken third line is particularly unfortunate. But either translation allows the nonFrench-speaking reader to grasp the schematic yet subtly drawn opposition between natural sensuality and cultural norms. The tendril and the Gothic archway, natural growth and cultural form, the one luxuriant, the other understated—the two antagonists in this lyric narrative of the Fall.

△

Robert Marteau is an old-fashioned poet, a believer in the power of the Word to reimpose a lost moral order on a world deprived of ritual. Generally humorless and impersonal, at times lacking in formal control, this poetry is nevertheless not to be taken lightly. One senses that this outstanding craftsman of images and verses is still working his way toward higher levels of formal integration. English-speaking readers, particularly those whose French is sufficient to compare text and translation, have an opportunity in these volumes to explore an enigmatic and compelling poetic landscape. △

Alter Sublime. CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY.
Coach House Press, 1980.

by DON BYRD

Dewdney's fourth book (i.e., *not* collection, miscellany) says things no one ever heard said before. The excellence of the book cannot be demonstrated by quotation. It is remarkable for its informing intelligence and its ability to sustain a charged surface. As I hear it at least, it is only in some of the short lyrics, when he seems to try to push a quantum beyond the sustained excitement and produce anthologizable little jewels, that the charge drops.

Sublime derives from *limen*, threshold, boundary, and is resonant with psychological, social, and occult matters. It means approaching a limit, thrusting *upward* toward a threshold, hence noble, magnificent. *Sub-*, however, is equivocal. It can situate us above as well as below the limit. We also have therefore sublim(inal).

Alter is, of course, "to change" but also "other." There is a sublime of things seeking entrance (unconscious—possibly more) and things seeking exit (Dewdney would say, nirvana). The closing sentence of *Alter Sublime*: "This is what is meant when one says, 'The poem always seeks the shortest distance between two points.' " If you alter one threshold, you alter both. The way up and the way down, etc., etc.

Dewdney quotes Sapir and Whorf and concludes: "In short the English language is a separate intelligence utilizing humans as the neural components in a vast and inconceivable sentience. The intact survival of this intelligence is threatened by one thing only, and that is the discovery and subsequent exploration of its plane of existence by ourselves, its human host." The sublime possibility of creation requires penetration of the subliminal and half-malignant intelligence of the living language.

The generation of poets born of WW II and after was taught by masters who find language a trustworthy medium or even more than a medium, a privileged repository. One thinks of the furniture in Spicer's room by which the martians deliver the poem, Olson's etymolgizing, and Duncan's "we had begun to see that language is faithful to itself." The younger poets have, for the most part, found language treacherous, perhaps precisely because it is

faithful to *itself.* We are tenuous, withdrawn from declaration—or have been. I think that's coming to an end. LANGUAGE—perhaps the best and most characteristic publication of the younger poets—might have been called FEAR OF LANGUAGE. It's been necessary, instructive. The first generation to live life-long with the A-bomb has processed its fear through every dimension.

The—perhaps fortuitous—result of this fear has been to short-circuit the usually slow process of dialectic evolution. Dewdney notes the dialectical upheaval in Jamaica and says that it "is primarily configured by sympathetic magic." In North American poetry, it has been configured by fear—not as noble an impetus perhaps—but a decade of white-knuckled free-fall has left us in new territory. Dewdney is solidly grounded there and is beginning to send back maps.

There begins to appear in Dewdney and a few other poets of the post-war generation a possibility in language which strikes me as new. A big claim, I know, but I am not aware that there has been a comparable discovery—a previously unknown *form* (form!) of linguistic energy—since Pound began to construct a poem from disjunctive, ideogrammatic radicals.

I am not sure of how to speak of this development. Dewdney touches on it again and again in "Parasite Maintenance" but fails, I think, to name it or specify it clearly: "The poet cultivates a sort of voluntary paraphasia, and it is *this* function over-riding the House of the living language that reorganizes the neurochemistry & cascade reactions of the House into the cryptic & capricious circuitry of the Parasite." If I understand what he is driving at, these cascading reactions arise from (at least) three conditions: 1) a sharp-cutting kind of feedback, the organism of the language and the speaker moving along a boundary beyond which it would break into uncontrollable oscillation; 2) a peculiar refusal of resolution (*lyric* resolution?); 3) a constructivism which combines radically diverse orders of discourse, in order to create not a closed design nor an open, *directional* form but a continually *re*-opening formal surface.

The first of these conditions can be demonstrated, almost adequately, in Dewdney's remarkable use of the closed parenthesis. He began to use parentheses in *Fovea Centralis* as a way to indicate the tenuous irresolution caused by a kind of feedback which constantly revises the text and plays havoc with

short-term memory. In *Alter Sublime*, this somewhat mechanical device yields to Dewdney's subtle hands:

> I was thought walking towards you. I thought (were you saying something?) I was trying to prove something. I thought (I thought I was trying to save someone) I was trying to talk to you. (I was walking towards you) I thought (a lion was walking beside you) we could talk (trying to speak to you) to each other. I thought (you were speaking to shortchange yourself) I was trying to prove something. Trying (to spite) someone out. There.

There is, as I hear it, not simply an alternate text half-appearing in, or through, the text but a host of alternatives. At first, one may feel not merely *left* dangling but dangling throughout. After a while—and the only thing to do is read on—you see that this is the *only* ground, and that you can walk on it.

The irresolution—the second condition—might be thought of as the emotional-intelligentual (to get in the intelligence, without the intellect) equivalent of seminal retention. Just at the moment of emission (the lyric flight, the conclusion), Dewdney holds back, not with juiceless academic irony or a mystifying skipped grove, but willfully. If seminal retention turns the virtue of the physical seed to spiritual use, the effect here is a *physical* thrust which allows the language to turn (trope) beyond the immediate excitement. In "Think Pool," Dewdney writes: "Specialize in evoking the transition zones in someone's emotionality. Those ambiguous moments between emotions, between thought and action, when a person is in the process of switching personae."

The third condition, the constructivist surface, is required by the first two (and it is not beside the point that the text also includes some of Dewdney's brilliant collages). *Alter Sublime* might seem at first a collection of inspired bits and fragments—prose and verse, language ranging from the high romantic diction of "Dreadlocks at the Helm" to the scientific diction of "Parasite Control," languages drawing from different kinds of logic butting-up against one another. Unlike Poundian ideograms, however, the technique is not analytic. There is no great, coherent text in the sky to which the notes at hand aspire. It never returns to, or letches after, some original and longed-for state of rest and silence. The despair of Pound in old age and the half-despair of an army of lesser poets over language's coming unglued

in our hands, leaving us to contend with words that slip and slide, gives way to the incitements of homographic language: "Poly-connotation builds up a static charge within the poem. . . . The elevated charge consequently alters the lexemic status of the words in the poem. They become homographs (heteronyms), host to a halo of meanings, much like the masts of (a ship) at sea crowned by St. Elmo's fire. (This deck is rigged.)"

The electron accelerators, exploding golf-ball earth, the mushroom clouds over Mt. Palomar (Wilson?) or juxtaposed over an ancient fossil, which appear in Dewdney's excellent graphic work in the volume, do not seem benign, but they are not romanticized. The theodicy of life and death is over. There is plenty of work to be done.

"Language was given to us by aliens, as a tool," Dewdney writes. That is, I take it, the genii of language were so alien(ated) that they took up *words* as well as sticks and flint. Well, we didn't *know* the gun was loaded, but Dewdney is among the useful investigators who are showing us we need not point it at our heads.

"Before remora chemitrodes (calling Dr. Delgado) consciousness was a function of the brain, now the brain (calling Dr. Delgado) is a function of consciousness." △

When They Have Senses. ROSMARIE WALDROP.
Burning Deck. 1980.

by ROBERT PETERS

Imagine contemporary poems chiselled into stele—those stone tablets erected by various ancient cultures to carry news and messages. Imagine these stele set up in shopping centers (modern agorae) for the public to read. Imagine further that time has obliterated portions of these inscriptions; the residue offering mere hints of connected meanings. Time has effaced words from the stele. The result is minimalist writing. Individual words still intact are forced to carry more meaning than if the original lines were still whole.

Several readings of Rosmarie Waldrop's new book convince me that what she writes is Stele Poetry. I eschew "runic," because the drift of her work is

demotic (public and informal) rather than hieratic (mystical). Armand Schwerner's lost/found tablet poetry is an earlier modern example of Stele Poetry, and some of Zukofsky, Pound, and Creeley may be read this way. Waldrop's immediate models are a trio of contemporary French poets: Edmund Jabès, whose *Elya* and *The Book of Questions* Waldrop has translated; and the minimalists Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach.

In a recent letter to me, Waldrop acknowledges a kinship. She feels "close" to Albiach and Royet-Journoud, both of whom she knows personally, both of whom have been translated by her husband Keith, of Burning Deck Press. As for Jabès, she says, she tries to defend herself against him. And Jabès is a powerful force. His books are hieratic, grounded in a mysticism of space-ground-language. Words are "the preferred prey," he writes, "of the nothing" around them. We emerge from the Void; our utterances, therefore, also emerge from that Void (or, Infinite), and are, like us, on their trajectory back into that Void. Through the white margins (the white silences) around our words, the Void speaks. We have mysterious ties to the Void, Jabès says; and it is here where that Universe of hints and secrets "waits to be discovered" that our poetry occurs. That Universe contains a "white light" which never reveals itself through out work; yet, it makes our writing possible. Each of our words is a "determined stone" in the "impregnable forces" of our selves in the Void. The book is scripture: "God leans on God, the book on the book, man on his shadow," writes Jabès. The book is also "the place where a writer sacrifices his voice to silence."

Obviously, a thoroughgoing imitation of Jabès would oblige one to treat the grand hieratic, metaphysical problems he loves. (One thinks of John Cage rewriting John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.) Jabès has little patience with such mundane matters as the relationship between the sexes, or the ephemeral shifts in nature, or in evanescent Ashberyean moods. His books read like portions of an Existentialist torah.

Waldrop's intentions are more modest. She adapts Jabès' notions of silence, light, and white space for her own concerns. If I read her correctly, she is a poet of ordinary lives rendered in brief, fragmented lines. She builds with stones; but the messages she chisels are more private and lyrical than those on Jabès' edifices; and they are more truncated. She seems preoccupied with male-female relationships. Along the way she arranges forms

and words to reflect frozen qualities; her words often seem remnants of some larger lost whole. Jabès seems much more assured, and seldom sounds unsure of himself. Let me show what I mean by examining a portion of one of Waldrop's longer poems.

First, the disposition of the final letter of her title, dropped a bit below the line (WHEN THEY HAVE SENSES), appears to have slipped from its affixed position on stone. What does she gain by this? Dual meanings emerge: when "they" have *sense* they shall have insight. When "they" have *senses* they will come to feel, touch, see, hear, and smell much more acutely than they are now able to do. They should then better comprehend these elusive poems. William Blake saw the fall of man as the loss of a vast angelic set of senses; Waldrop implies a similar loss as well. I must not overstress this connection, however. Waldrop is often more playful than Blake; viz., her series of poem-titles which read as if Gertrude Stein, that aficionado of the adverb, has written them. Waldrop's adverbs, in eurythmic gowns perform gladly, ecstatically, flowingly over the page. Gertrude would be pleased. Here are a few of Waldrop's titles: "The Senses Loosely or *The Married Woman*," "The Senses Continuously," "The Senses Barely," "The Senses Dumbly," "The Senses Visibly or *Two Very Handsome*," "The Senses Touchingly," etc.

In "Senses Barely or *The Necessities of Life*" (Part 3), Waldrop writes with maximum *stelic* effect, once the poem is underway. The opening trio of lines appears to deal with the rupture of a love liaison (a marriage, perhaps) elusively developed in parts 1 and 2. Here, the pair move into exile, hurrying like Lot and his wife through a cold town:

> they have no street in their hurry
> but leave with the cold
> and few household goods 1

There follows a hiatus of half an inch or so, which suggests that we have moved over to the next stele—to a pair of phrases set over to the right. The visual placement is important:

> a body of pure salt
> stationary abode 2

Has Lot's wife (or the abandoned modern wife) here turned to salt, her future abode ironically fixed forever, until rain and wind wear the salt down to nubbins in the sand? The Stele Mode seems to work here, as the reader

strives to complete the sense and flesh out good clause/verse lines from Waldrop's hints.

Then follows another hiatus between slabs/stanzas—this one a space or two longer than the first one, suggesting again that we are at a new stele. To give an accurate sense of the placing of the poem on the page, I shall here give the remaining stanzas, meticulously observing the spacings. The numberings of the stanzas (stelae) are mine:

preceded
by repetition
by empty bottles 3

the time it takes
to mix
the male and female
matter 4

none of the steps may be
omitted 5

changes into
unrecognizable
straight lines 6

"she was with him"
the day after
in relative order
whereas 7

the necessary eye
of the sun
overgrows 8

Fragment 3 is cryptic, despite its seeming to flow grammatically within its form. A possible reading is that before the wife turned to exile, her life was salt. It was boring—a matter of repetitions and empty bottles. Mr. and Mrs. Lot were like bottles emptied, drained of love. After another break, a new inscription informs us that when the "mix" of male and female was complete, the marriage was over. The *Mystery* had lost its *mystery*, had become commonplace. Stanza 5 is an observation, almost Orphic in its insight: there is no shortening of the route that linked males and females must take, towards becoming salt. This moment of commentary is forceful since it

is set off by itself, and has a stele all of its own. We linger and meditate on the writing; and the burden on us is enormous—like deciphering sphinx-like riddles. While our own lives are not in jeopardy if we fail to decipher accurately, the lives of the poem and the book containing the poem are; for, if we dislike the book, or resent the obligations Waldrop imposes, we may throw the book in the trash.

I read No. 6 as 3 fragmented lines with minimal linkage between them. "Changes into" sits by itself and seems to relate to changing into salt. "Unrecognizable"—yes, the human figure once alive and now salt is unrecognizable; also, the changes in the pair's love-life creating these results are unrecognizable. Whatever the meanings, the word sits isolated, the other words that might illuminate it have fallen from the stele. The "lines" are straight—which means that they can be recognized; and this is why I don't take "unrecognizable" as an adjective modifying "straight lines." Waldrop seems to be saying that our peregrinations away from portions of our lives that have chilled are indeed the primary (straight) lines of our lives.

A foreign voice next intrudes, expressing amazement that *she* is no longer with *him*. Obviously; for she has remained behind, turned to salt, and is no longer recognizable. If I were to suggest the words lost from this stele they might go this way. My additions are in the brackets:

> "she was with him" [the day they left the city.]
> The day after [they left the city]
> in relative order [he preceded her, in customary fashion]
> whereas [now she is no longer with him.]

The final fragment presents a dazzling close. Light shimmers over the entire event, "overgrows" it, and reduces it to the minuscule and poignantly human. Beneath the glare, the potency of the event (the destruction of a love/marriage) is reduced to a minor crescendo.

My metaphor of the stele, I hope, does give some idea of how Waldrop's poetry works. The burden on the reader is most of the time welcome. Waldrop assumes that her reader, willing to decipher her meanings, will relish the hunt and the verbal play. For, finally, these poems turn on verbalism—the *word* is as important as the *message*. And my efforts to wrench a continuous prose meaning of a narrative sort is possibly a violation of Waldrop's intentions. I don't feel though that I am entirely perverse in trying. I need to register some sense as I move through this book. And if I am

old-fashioned in this, I refuse to apologize. I have merely tried to explain via a metaphor what I have found useful in reading Waldrop. I will say, however, that I find her intriguing and intelligent. I hope I am not one of the "cannibal spirits" she mentions who do "violence to words." Read the book and make your own judgments. All of the poems do lend themselves well to my stele metaphor. Perhaps the motif may be useful in defining and reading other contemporary poets.

Because of her preoccupation with a special experimental poetry being written in France, Waldrop is an unusual poet. Most American poets seem to revere Spanish and Latin American writers, among foreign poets, perhaps because these writers create more continuous, less-truncated poems, with more straightforward images. If one sees Vallejo, Neruda, and Paz as beef-red, Waldrop and Jabès are white—their neutral tones reveal an obsession with moving poetry into worlds of abstraction and meditation, worlds where furniture is largely absent and from which we are invited to fashion a private metaphysic of silence. Jabès wrote: "I do not exist except in relation to the space of a word uttered. . . . Between the word heard and the word to be said, in this half-silence which is the last refuge of the echo, there is my place." △

Staves Calends Legends. THOMAS MEYER.
The Jargon Society: Jargon 88, 1979. $10.00 paper.

by DONALD WESLING

An example:

at least one bud
on that blackthorn
below Low Barn
this year, last, yes
& the year before

showed its white nib
earlier than the rest
ab la dolchor for Paul
Blackburn

Meyer is alright. These are poems written in his twenties, several of them as elegant and as fully realized as the one above. Where he's good, so I judge, is in the quick notation, the burst of desire or grief or friendship, the delight with English etymology and the sounds of English ("Idiolects," in his term: "fleen a grubbes/al gerymdon": explained in a bright note in the book); and in the gold-balance weighing of syllable, line, stanza. When the book does versions from Pindar (12th Pythian Ode) or from Anglo-Saxon poetry, whatever was researched is turned into keen modern English. But young Meyer has committed himself to some phoney archaizing, too, notably in the version of Aelfric's Colloquy which takes up too much of the middle of the book with its slack measures, and in the arch notes on the "faery" of folk-ballads, and in the mock-ballad (not mocking enough) which brings the late middle ages back as nostalgia, "The Telling of Sir Thomas Valentyne." The super-literary quality of the legends in the book may be one phase of the search for an adequate subject, but on this showing it is doubtful any more literature can be made from medieval magic. The Jargon Society has printed the poems with stark beauty, but has indulged the author too much by putting on the back-cover and frontispiece a picture of chalice and grail, heart and cross, emblem of the author's more ineffectual archaizing. Surely there is more than enough subject matter in America in the twentieth century, in anybody's ordinary experience if it could be understood, and surely Meyer can make a more compelling autobiographical legend; as for the staves, no problem whatever there. △

The Pronouns: A Collection of Forty Dances for the Dancers. JACKSON MAC LOW. Station Hill, 1979. $3.95.

by BARBARA EINZIG

The publication of this book is a happy and welcome occasion for many of us long acquainted with the work of Jackson Mac Low. *The Pronouns* were created in 1964 but until now have been unavailable, except in a privately circulated mimeographed form and a deluxe limited edition from Tetrad Press. As with the *Light Poems* (Black Sparrow, 1968) and *Stanzas for*

Iris Lezak (Something Else, 1971), we find Mac Low holding the prism of his systematic chance operations up to a word source (in this case, an 850-word Basic English Word List), diffracting a pure and brilliant poetry.

The Pronouns developed out of the *Nuclei for Simone Forti*, a card pack of actions. After two performances from these cards (by Simone Forti and then Trisha Brown), Mac Low composed the "1ST DANCE — MAKING THINGS NEW" for dancer Fred Herko: "He makes himself comfortable/& matches parcels. . ." After then composing a "she" poem for Trisha Brown, the poet decided to write a dance-instruction-poem for every word listed as a pronoun in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. As is his disciplined but flexible wont, forty dances seemed enough, but here they are in print, along with: "Some Remarks to the Dancers (How the Dances Are To Be Performed & How They Were Made)"; "Reflections on the Occasion of the DANCE SCOPE Issue," a 1974 statement of poetics; a 77/78 statement entitled "The 'THEY' Manifesto," calling for the use of "they" instead of the more cumbersome "he or she" or the generic "he"; and some black and white photographs by Peter Moore from the performances of eight of the *Pronouns* dances during the *3rd Annual New York Avant Garde Festival*, 10 September 1965.

The Pronouns are intended to be read aloud as poems or to be realized as dances, or to be simultaneously realized as sound and movement. As with many of his previous works, Mac Low calls for the "active collaboration of performers &/or audience." Reading *The Pronouns* as a book, in conjunction with the accompanying documents, one is struck by the integrity of their conception, performances, history, and possibilities. As Jerome Rothenberg states: "Mac Low is the master of a poetics that goes further than that of any contemporary poet towards defining what poetry has always been about," what Gertrude Stein regarded as calling upon the name of anything over and over. Pronouns are often heard as "empty" words, standing in for someone, but here they exist in their (its, anybody's, whatever's) own right; given attention as language, within a context of ever changing and repeating events, their qualities are pronounced and distinguished:

> She seems to come by wing,
> & keeping present being in front,
> she reasons regularly . . . .
>
> (2nd DANCE — SEEING LINES

Presently one of these skirts a rod,
& another of these does something down on the floor,
attacking another of these,
while the rest of these question these two,
who answer by putting off something.

(14th DANCE – DOING SOMETHING UNDER
THE CONDITIONS OF COMPETITION)

Which begins by giving falsely?

& then which gives a bit or does something elastic,
even though having the chest between two things,
while saying things about making gardens?

(32nd DANCE – GIVING ENOUGH OF ANYTHING
TO ANYONE)

At the beginning none makes a structure with a roof or under a
roof,
& none gets news.

Is it then that none has a letter over one eye?

(39th DANCE – SEEMING TO COME BY WING)

We can read the instructions to the dancers as poetics: dancers are free to choreograph the poems themselves but are "required to find some *definite interpretation of the meaning of every line* of the dance poems they choose to realize. Above all, no line or series of lines may be left uninterpreted & unrealized simply because it seems too complicated or obscure to realize as movement (&/or sound or speech)." This is entirely consistent with his DANCE SCOPE statement, dated "1965, with minor revisions 8/29/74, 3/30/78 & 2/22/79": "The poet creates a *situation* wherein she or he invites other persons & the world in general to be co-creators. The poet does not wish to be a dictator but a loyal co-initiator of action within the free society of equals which it is hoped the work will help to bring about."

Jackson Mac Low has given many readings of *The Pronouns*: I was present at one of them in Milwaukee in 1975. He read with the dogged precision and good humor so uniquely his: the actions and pronouns recurred, but with each recurrence they were given equal voice. Slowly the audience, many members of which had been required by their teachers to at-

tend, emptied out, but this only improved the acoustics. I felt that I was attending an enactment of Gertrude Stein's revelation that "one hundred" is truly made up of "one and one and one and one and one and. . ." I look forward to the publication this year of Mac Low's *Gathas* by Membrane Press and his *Representative Works* by Ross-Erickson and would give back to the poet, in dedication, his 10th DANCE – COMING ON AS A HORN:

Thou comest by.

& then thou goest about between & through unserious-seeming
goings-on,
& thou hammerest.

Presently thou art making a bridge & giving it to someone,
making decisions,
& making a cake.

Thou gettest out with things,
& thou gettest insects.

Thou comest against something or thou fearest things.

Thou dost something in the manner of a sister whose mind is
happy & willing,
thou writest with a bad pen,
& either thou puttest something slow under an insect,
& thou hast or seem'st to have serious holes,
albeit thine ending be one wherein thou reactest to orange hair. △

Ranger (Volume I). THEODORE ENSLIN.
North Atlantic Books. 1978.
Ranger (Volume II). THEODORE ENSLIN.
North Atlantic Books. 1980.
Yellow Lola: Formerly Titled Japanese Neon (Hello La Jolla, Book II). ED DORN. Cadmus Editions. 1981.
Horse Sacrifice. CHARLES STEIN.
Station Hill Press. 1980.

by BILL ZAVATSKY

I wish I could report myself the virtuous reviewer and say that I have read all of the nearly 700 pages of Theodore Enslin's two-volume poem, or five books of a poem. Why haven't I? Because the level of abstraction and ostensible lack of connection within and from section to section of this immense work drive me away. Enslin operates within the tradition of those poets who brought us closer to the way we really talk, to American speech. Much of *Ranger I* and *II*, however, sets up a negative pole to Pound's dictum about composing in the cadences of ordinary speech: it is that talk, run-on, creates a kind of a-poetic black hole capable of swallowing up even the finest sensibility, or the most dedicated attention-span. Here is the opening of part XXXVIII from *Ranger I*:

Intensity—
or white heat—
(red or blue or white.
So what about it?
Art doesn't improve
(nor do men)
They both change—not much.
So—what about it?
How does the change occur?
where?
is it?
Do the seeds flower
to a final fire?
What is implicit?
Why should anything
be?
or have no being?
(Even in strong sunlight,
the threat of rain,
and the earth waits
swollen.
Breaking against it—
nothing but the head—
the darkness
assumes,
subsumes,
a cloud—
Or smoke?
White heat, or workings.

Enslin's method: to catch every droplet of his thought, even banalities like the above. The problem is that over hundreds of pages, over thousands of lines, every thought isn't important, and Enslin seems not to know this, or to care. "Nothing but the head" is right. We get little feel of space, location, the physical world, here—only mental space. It isn't enough. A kind of claustrophobia takes hold of the reader—this reader, at least—almost from the opening lines, a strange feeling to have on a voyage into a poem as long as this. Finally what initially appeared as rigor takes on the taint of the merely querulous, and grows exasperating in its narcissism. Enslin has written some lovely short poems, and his longer works (*Ranger* included) have been excerpted to advantage in the issues of *Occurrence* and *Truck* devoted to his work. This poem in its bulk will undoubtedly find its readers, but I must pass on it.

Yellow Lola by Ed Dorn ("Formerly Titled Japanese Neon," its subtitle tells us archly) "is more or less raw thought of which *Hello, La Jolla*," Dorn's most recent collection, "is the product." All one has to do is to pronounce both titles to see the author's wit at work, and perhaps there is no harm in seeing this volume as a collaborative *jeu d'esprit*. I am only sometimes among those who pleasure in the obliquity of Dorn's intelligence. *Yellow Lola* has half a dozen thoughtful or amusing snippets among its nicely-designed pages, but for my six dollars a few chuckles aren't enough. At his best here—and he is much better elsewhere—Dorn writes:

> It is said poetry audiences
> have one of the highest tedium tolerances
> in the business, and that
> this is proven by their willingness
> to sit still for nearly anything.
>
> However, I've always assumed
> the opposite, and that, in fact
> their steely determination
> is one of the finest instruments
> of modern times.

and:

> Success?
>
> I never had to worry about success
> Coming from where I come from
> You were a success the minute you left town

These last lines remind me why I've always thought of Dorn as the Clint Eastwood of American poetry. As a peek at his notebooks, which is what *Yellow Lola* is, "selected and in some cases arranged by Tom Clark," this collection will be of interest especially to the diehard Dornophile.

Charles Stein's low-key work has never much excited me, but I must admit that *Horse Sacrifice* turned my head. If these poems are hermetically sealed, they nevertheless open into an inner reality which for the most part I find utterly absorbing. They are oddly similar to Ron Padgett's excursions into mental imagery, but where Padgett tends toward the cartoon fantasies of Tex Avery, Stein determinedly moves toward Jung. (This isn't a value judgment; I like what both poets do.)

Most of the work here appears to be the product of exercises in active imagination, a kind of Jungian meditation, and when Stein is presenting the phenomena of his consciousness, the "movie" of his mental "trip," the results are stirring, real adventure in the livest sense of that word. When he labels his thought, veering from image toward explanation, the air escapes from the poem. Granted that, for him, presentation and rumination may be inseparable, but labelling doesn't make for very good poetry:

> We are hung
> suspended
> and in that respect the interconnections
> pre-exist their recognitions. This is not
> *visionary*
> in any *special* sense.
>
> I don't want to attain
> any longer any
> *special*
> condition of the mind
> and yet this is so because I see now
> there is no
> *natural*
> stand point
> in the sense of something common
> something previous
> some recognition
> earlier than thought
> common to all.

Fortunately, we never get more than a page of this, and the dead sections, boring as they are, don't swamp the vigorous process:

I sit
and keep going over
the same thought.

I am buried
at the bottom
of an animal
who cannot stop
breathing
and I accept this.

I do not attempt to force
my beast, my captor
to stop this interminable
rising
and falling
of the breath.

I am at peace
and reconciled
and I come to rest here.

Sometimes Stein's ear goes dead:

It spread out everywhere
and nothing happening in any
part of it
wasn't part of it.
. . .

He was alone
and very old
and everything there was
is
his parts.

But—and as I type out these quotations I realize how much the whole poem in which they reside has to be read—there are glorious moments as well:

I am sitting in the house
and think to become as quiet
as anything there is.
I think to let
all the molecular displacements
continue and the one
fructifying
ray
penetrate
each consequent
condition
and I propose to follow the flow
thought upon thought
penetrating and residing
within each consequent
propositional state.
All the looms
are running at once.
All the clay wheels
are spinning
because of the action
of the foot of each
of the women
kicking the kick wheels
everything
is
at the same time
running by the continuation
of their own original energies.

"Bus Trip," one of the book's longer poems, shows Stein handling the realization of manifold identity in the dream in a beautiful way, simply and clearly, using just enough repetition to counterpoint and heighten. The title poem begins promisingly enough but succumbs to programmatics—in this case, myth shoved down its throat. Division into parts doesn't help the flow, and here the introduction of movie material (a mention of the horse-killing in *The Godfather*, for example) cheapens the poem. In fact, "Horse Sacrifice" and "Song" seem to belong to a different book altogether.

But despite patches of rhetoric and the occasional annoying nod of discipleship, Stein has found a channel to his own imagination. When his mind is moving and seizing the gorgeous or gritty images as they wind upwards in the spine or shiver from the brain, Stein carries the reader effortlessly into his discoveries. If his next book grips me as much as *Horse Sacrifice* I will have to go back and re-read everything he has done. △

Vingt poètes américains.
Paris: Gallimard, 1980.

by David R. Smith

Vingt poètes américains (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), a bilingual anthology, is a welcome attempt to introduce French readers to "l'explosion de la poésie," which has taken place in the United States in the second half of this century. It is welcome, but, sad to say, as with all anthologies which pretend to be representative, it is also vexing. The problems here suggest a combination of editorial eccentricity and confusion.

The confusion is clear. Jacques Roubaud, a mathematician and dedicated *amateur de la poésie américaine*, conceived the anthology in 1972 and completed it in 1975; but Gallimard delayed publication until last year and in the interim asked the French poet Michel Deguy to help bring the project to its present state. A cover note indicates that the introduction is by Roubaud and that the choices are by Deguy and Roubaud. There is a niceness in what the note does not say. The book seems to be no one's baby, a child of two fathers, neither of whom claims it.

That there are editorial eccentricities is equally clear. Roubaud's *présentation* lets us know that the "absence of R. Creeley is independent of the compiler's wishes"—a question of royalties, surely; but it does not do so well in explaining other exclusions and inclusions. Indeed, as with Byron, I wish he would explain his explanation. Whimsy seems to govern the editorial process, which is the more unfortunate given the importance of the task. According to Roubaud, general sentiment in France has it that there has not been an American poet of importance since Whitman ("chacun sait que Pound est un Européen"). Since the book's aim was to introduce a generation unknown to French, the few Americans who were known—Ginsberg, Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, who, he indicates, are not very interesting anyway—could be eliminated. He was left, nonetheless, with a very large number to choose from. The job was complicated by French ignorance of even this generation's forebears. Williams, Stevens, Cummings, Olson, O'Hara, he writes, have been paid at best sporadic attention in France, where no one has heard of Zukofsky, Oppen, Spicer. With those "givens" and a logic that escapes me, he then includes (perhaps with some help) Olson, Zukofsky, Oppen, Spicer and excludes Williams, Stevens, Cummings, O'Hara. And then, apparently still talking about forebears, he asks in something less than a *sequitur*, "Who in 1975 knows Gertrude Stein as anything more than a collector of anecdotes about Picasso?"

It is thus that *Vingt poètes américains* opens with Stein's "Stanzas in Meditation," translated by Roubaud. These are generally good translations, despite one or two occasions when the ellipses in Stein's cryptic syntax are gallicly filled in. Here, of course, is a problem basic to any such undertaking as this. The grammatic ruptures and syntactic disjunctures necessary to the casually converging yet simultaneous states of mind, streams of consciousness, as they have entered contemporary American poetry, do not lend themselves easily to translation of any kind, perhaps least of all to French with its grammatic self-consciousness and need for completion and elegance. But if the lines of filiation he was talking about are at stake, a question lingers. What is Stein doing here if Williams is not? Roubaud makes no effort to justify her presence aside from his apparent desire to rescue her from the reputation he has assigned her.

The problem of exclusion-inclusion does not end here. Nathaniel Tarn (who was born in France, speaking of lines of filiation) is included; and his

work is certainly worth it; but others who seem more central to the explosion of poetry in question—Kelly, Snyder, Bly, Ignatow, for example—are not. Why are the women represented only by Denise Levertov and Rosmarie Waldrop? Where are Sexton, Rich, Plath, Wakoski?

The translations themselves are generally very good, though there are a few bloopers. Zukofsky, for example, sometimes escapes his handlers who in one case become so tangled in his intricate patterns of sound and sense that they miss one and then the other. Anne-Marie Albiach's rendering of the first three lines of "A 9" illuminates the problem.

> An impulse to action sings of a semblance
> Of things related as equated values,
> The measure of all use is time congealed labor. . . .

This becomes:

> Un élan vers l'action propose une semblance
> De choses données en equité de dosages,
> La mesure toute usage est tempes glacial en son effort.

Why not "chante" in the first line? That would have preserved the assonances, approached the alliteration, and rendered the sense. The subordinate clause of the third line ("all use," pronoun and verb) becomes adjective-substantive in a line that makes less than sense. Nor does "temps glacial en son effort" mean the same thing or render the compressed senses of "time congealed labor." One could hope that a translator would understand the language better than that. And Roubaud has troubles in "A 22." "Blow blue up against yellow" becomes "soufflent bleu haut contre jaune." It makes a kind of sense, but not the one Zukofsky intended nor the one English contains. A better dictionary and a little consultation would have helped.

Indeed, some of the best translations in the volume (and surely among the most difficult) are those of Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, and Clayton Eshleman; and they all benefitted from council and conference. Deguy and Margaret Brooks translated Duncan; Deguy, Roubaud, R. Skodnick, and K. White did the Olson; and Deguy, Michel de Fornel, Janet Litman and Didier Pemerle the Eshleman. In "The Name Encanyoned River" (included here), Eshleman ironically says that "translating is a child's / game," but the proposition is not literally true, as Ms. Albiach's efforts amply prove. It is a

poet's game and equally a scholar's. The two, of course, can be one; who would want to draw a line between feeling and knowing? Translating (particularly this often difficult work) requires a variety of talents, as is amply illustrated by the success of the joint efforts led by Michel Deguy. △

▲

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From 1967 through 1973, Clayton Eshleman published and edited 20 issues of CATERPILLAR magazine. Robert Kelly was contributing editor. Like SULFUR, CATERPILLAR presented a wide range of American and international poetries, with reviews, essays, artwork and music. The magazine was anthologized during its run in 1971 by Doubleday-Anchor—but A CATERPILLAR ANTHOLOGY has been out of print since 1976. Issues #1 and #2 are only available in the few remaining complete runs. The following issues, priced relative to availability, can be purchased from the editor

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#13 (1970—160 pages), 26 contributors, including N.O. Brown, Stanley, Ginsberg, Mac Low, Nora Jaffe, McInerney, Goodell, Rothenberg, Kelly and Marlatt: $6.

#14 (1971—160 pages), 25 contributors, including Brakhage's correspondence with MOMA, Ginsberg's Blake notes, and Berman, Palmer, Enslin, Dawson, Irby, and Creeley: $5.

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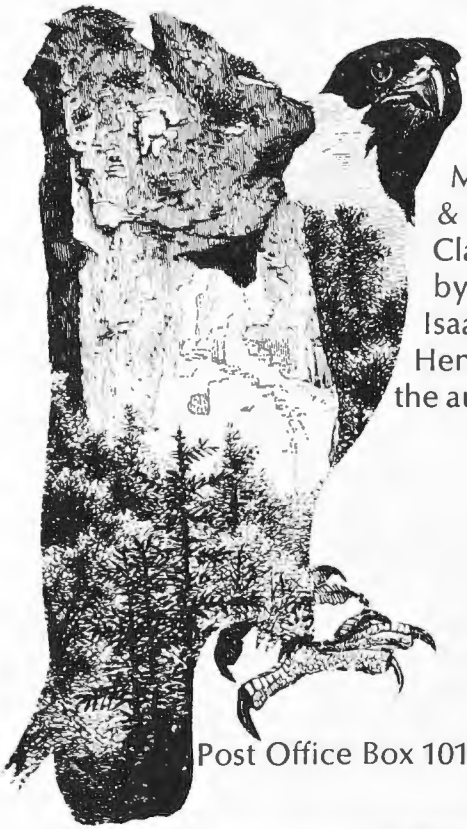

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